

UA 16/96

Fear of torture / Health concern /
Prisoners of conscience

26 January 1996

SYRIAMustafa al-Hussain

'Umar al-Hayak
Muhammad Kheir Khalaf
'Abd al-Karim 'Issa
'Abdalla Qabbara
Hikmat Mirjaneh
Yassin al-Haj Salih
Yusha' al-Khatib
Mazin Shamsin
Firas Yunis

Ten prisoners of conscience are reported to have recently been moved to Tadmur military prison after refusing to sign a statement promising that they will dissociate themselves from all past political activities and expressing support for the present regime. Given that Tadmur military prison is renowned for its harsh conditions and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners there is common, Amnesty International fears that these men may face torture or ill-treatment whilst held there. As prisoners of conscience, all 10 should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Reports that some of the men are in need of medical attention are raising additional concern, especially as lack of adequate medical care for prisoners is common in Syria. Mustafa al-Hussain and Muhammad Kheir Khalaf are said to be suffering from mental illness, 'Abdalla Qabbara reportedly suffers from diabetes, 'Umar al-Hayak from scabies, 'Abd al-Karim 'Issa from tuberculosis, and Hikmat Mirjaneh from an unspecified "eye disease".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The first eight men named above were among more than 100 people arrested between 1980 and 1990 in connection with the unauthorized Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB), *al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-Maktab al-Siyassi*. At least one of the eight, 'Abdalla Qabbara, was reported to have been tortured during his interrogation. Most of the detainees were released at the end of 1991 or during the first half of 1992 in large-scale amnesties, but the eight remained in prison. Their trials began in 1992 on charges of membership of, or links with the CPPB, and in 1994 they were sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to terms of imprisonment of between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment. One of them - Yassin al-Haj Salih - was due for release in December 1995 having already served 15 years in detention. Despite another amnesty in November 1995, to mark the anniversary of President al-Assad's 25th year in power, when as many as 1,000 political prisoners are believed to have been released, the eight remained in prison together with scores of political prisoners including other prisoners of conscience.

The other two men named above also spent long periods of time in pre-trial detention before being brought to trial in 1992 and sentenced in 1994. Both were imprisoned for their links with the Party for Communist Action (*Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i*). Firas Yunis was arrested in 1981 and tried only 13 years later, in October 1994. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Mazin Shamsin was arrested in 1990 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in April 1994.

Amnesty International considers all 10 to be prisoners of conscience as they have neither used nor advocated violence and are imprisoned solely on the basis of their political beliefs or affiliation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters in Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing deep concern that 10 prisoners of conscience (naming some or all) have been moved to Tadmur military prison;
- seeking assurances that they are being protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment and will be granted immediate and continuing access to family members and lawyers;
- noting that six (naming some or all) are known to be in need of medical attention and seeking assurances that they will be provided with all the medical care they require while they remain in prison;
- noting that, while many other political prisoners benefited from a Presidential amnesty in November 1995, these men are reported to have been exempted from the terms of the amnesty because of their refusal to sign a statement recanting their political beliefs;
- calling for the 10 to be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 prespl sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Dr Muhammad Harba
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Husayn Hassun
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria
Salutation: Your Excellency

The prison director
Tadmur military prison
Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Director, Tadmur military prison, Syria

Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES TO:

His Excellency
Dr Iyad al-Shatti
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 March 1996.