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To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / Middle East Program
Date: 24 April 2001

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION
Ill-health of Wajih Ghanim, prisoner of conscience
Syria

Key words lack of medical care / ill-health / prisoner of conscience

Summary

Wajih Ghanim, a prisoner of conscience imprisoned in Sednaya prison in the outskirts of Damascus, is believed to be in poor health and in need of medical care for a number of illnesses. He is said to be suffering from degeneration of the vertebrae, urinary tract infection and stomach problems. In addition he is suffering from chronic headache and hypertension. These medical problems together with the absence of fellow prisoners of conscience - following the release of these fellow prisoners after a presidential amnesty in November 2000 - have led to psychological disturbance.

Wajih Ghanim was arrested in 1987 for his involvement with the Party for Communist Action (PCA). He was reportedly tortured and ill-treated while being interrogated by the Syrian security forces. In 1994 he was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labour. Amnesty International calls for further information on his current health, for providing him with access to sufficient medical care and for his immediate and unconditional release.

Recommended actions

Please write letters in English or Arabic:

- seeking information about the diagnosis and current health of Wajih Ghanim, imprisoned in Sednaya prison;
- urging he is provided with adequate medical care according to his needs as provided for by international human rights standards such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [Article 22];
- seeking information about the medical services available in the prison;
- calling on the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Wajih Ghanim.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 24 June 2001, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Addresses

His Excellency Dr Bashar al-Assad
President
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
Damascus,
Syrian Arab Republic
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Dr. Muhammad Harba
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Nasser Qaddour
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Al-Rashid Street
Damascus,
Syrian Arab Republic
Faxes: + 963 11 224 5747

Copies

Director
Sednaya Prison
c/o Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Dear Director

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

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MEDICAL CONCERN

**Ill-health of Wajih Ghanim, prisoner of conscience
Syria**

Wajih Ghanim, a prisoner of conscience imprisoned in Sednaya prison in the outskirts of Damascus, is believed to be in poor health and in need of medical care for a number of illnesses. He is said to be suffering from degeneration of the vertebrae, urinary tract infection and stomach problems. In addition he is suffering from chronic headache and hypertension. These medical problems together with the absence of fellow prisoners of conscience - following the release of these fellow prisoners after a presidential amnesty in November 2000 - have led to psychological disturbance.

Background information

Wajih Ghanim is a former government employee, born in 1946, and is married with one child. He was arrested along with others in the coastal city of Latakia in August 1987 for his involvement with the Party for Communist Action (PCA). At the time of the arrest of Wajih Ghanim and his compatriots the Syrian security forces were reported to have carried out a major search of dozens of houses in pursuit of PCA activists. Dozens of party members and friends were reported to have been arrested and interrogated. Some of them were released after a number of weeks during which they were reportedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment.

Wajih Ghanim was also reported to have been tortured and ill-treated while being interrogated by the Syrian security forces following his arrest, apparently in an attempt to extract information about the PCA and its membership. Wajih Ghanim reportedly sustained injuries as a result of torture by electric shocks and the "Nazi Chair" - a metal chair with moving parts, which causes acute hyper-extension of the spine and severe pressure on the victim's neck and limbs. At the time he was reported to have suffered from internal bleeding and a paralysed arm.

Wajih Ghanim was charged with affiliation to the Party for Communist Action (PCA), which the Syrian authorities describe as "an organisation intended to change the social and economic structure of the state and society's fundamental conditions" and "opposing the objectives of the Revolution". He was subsequently tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) and sentenced in 1994 to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labour.

Medical ethics and human rights

A number of international human rights standards refer to the provision of medical care to prisoners. The *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* (United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and The Treatment of Offenders, 1955, last amended in 1984) states that:

art 22 (1) At every institution there shall be available the services of at least one qualified medical officer who should have some knowledge of psychiatry (..).

(2) Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civic hospitals (..).

The *Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners* (UN General Assembly, 1990) states in the ninth principle that:

“Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation”.

Amnesty International calls for access to sufficient medical care for Wajih Ghanim and for his immediate and unconditional release.