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Syria: Release of Riad al-Turk and other prisoners - a step forward

The release last Saturday of prisoners of conscience Riad al-Turk and Aktham Nu'aysa and 28 political prisoners is a positive step, Amnesty International said today as it called on the Syrian authorities to release all other prisoners of conscience.

Riad al-Turk, a lawyer in his late sixties, has been held since 1980 without charge or trial in connection with the unauthorized Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB). He was tortured throughout his detention and is believed to be in poor health. Riad al-Turk has been held almost completely without access to the outside world since his arrest -- he was seen only three times by his family during his 18 years' incarceration.

Aktham Nu'aysa, a lawyer in his late forties, had been serving a nine-year sentence in connection with his work for the Committee for the Defence of Freedoms and Human Rights (CDF). His trial by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in 1991 was grossly unfair. He was tortured during the initial stage of his detention.

Both Riad al-Turk and Aktham Nu'aysa have been adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. The organisation has been campaigning for years for their immediate and unconditional release, as they should not have been detained in the first place.

Amnesty International remains seriously concerned at the continued detention of scores of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners sentenced after unfair trials. Almost all those detained were reportedly tortured and ill-treated. They include members of various unauthorised political organizations and Lebanese and Palestinian nationals.

"The Syrian Government should mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year by instituting the guarantees which will ensure that human rights violations such as prolonged incommunicado detention, torture and ill-treatment, unfair trials and "disappearances" are forever abolished in Syria," Amnesty International said.

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