EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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1 May 1992

Please bring this action to the attention of the person responsible for outreach work in your section as it is felt that appeals from medical professionals might be particularly useful.

Further information on UA 385/91 (MDE 24/08/91 of 11 November 1991) - and new Health Concern

SYRIA:

Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi and 15 others

Yusuf al-Burji - released

Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi, a prisoner of conscience, is reported to be in a critical condition after suffering a heart attack on 26 or 27 April. He is known to be diabetic and suffers from hypertension. He is said to have been admitted to Tishrin Hospital in Damascus for treatment. Dr al-Atassi, former president and prime minister of Syria, has been held without charge or trial for almost 22 years in al-Mezze Military Prison, Damascus.

Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi, aged 63, studied medicine at the University of Damascus and practised as a physician in Homs prior to his first ministerial appointment in August 1963 as Minister of the Interior. In 1966 he became President of the Republic and Secretary-General of the Syrian Ba'th Party, and in 1968 was also appointed Prime Minister. He held these posts until his arrest in November 1970.

Amnesty International has learned that Yusuf al-Burji was released on 2 April 1992.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi and Yusuf al-Burji are members of a group of people arrested in 1970 and 1971 following the November 1970 coup which brought President Hafez al-Assad to power. All served in or were connected with the former government and were arrested for refusing to cooperate with the new government. Sixteen of them remain in detention without charge or trial in al-Mezze Military Prison.

Some of them were allegedly tortured after arrest, and they are all said to be in poor health as a result of prolonged detention and inadequate medical facilities. All 16 are adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience. Over the years the organization has repeatedly expressed concern over their health and appealed for their immediate and unconditional release.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

- expressing concern that Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi is reported to be critically ill;
- seeking assurances that he will receive all medical treatment necessary during his illness and that he, as well as the other 15 detainees arrested with him, will be given regular medical attention;

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- expressing concern at their continued detention without trial for almost 22 years and calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all 16 detainees as prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO

1) His Excellency Your Excellency

President Hafez al-Assad Presidential Palace

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: 419160 munjed sy

2) His Excellency Muhammad Harba Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior Ministry of the Interior Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria

3) His Excellency Khalid al-Ansari Your Excellency

Minister of Justice Ministry of Justice

Nasr Street

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria

4) His Excellency Dr. Iyad al-Shatti Your Excellency

Minister of Health Ministry of Health al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Health Minister, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: HEALTH 412655 sy

5) His Excellency Faruq al-Shar'a Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Al-Rashid Street

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegram: Foreign Affairs Minister, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: 411922

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Medical Association:

Dr. M. Cherif Bakle Ordre des Medicins Syriens Place de l'Etoile Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 12 June 1992.