

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/09/98

15 June 1998

Further information on UA 296/97 (MDE 24/14/97, 9 September 1997) - Medical concern/Prisoner of conscience

SYRIA Aktham Nu'aysa, 46, lawyer

We are pleased to inform you that prisoner of conscience Aktham Nu'aysa was released at the end of May 1998. He appears to be in good spirits after his release and is very grateful to Amnesty International for campaigning on his behalf.

Aktham Nu'aysa, a Syrian lawyer and human rights defender, was arrested in 1991 along with others in connection with his involvement in the Committee for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights (CDF). He was later charged, along with nine others, for disseminating false information and receiving money from abroad, and sentenced in 1992 to 9 years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) after a grossly unfair trial. The charges were brought in relation to a leaflet which was published by the CDF criticising the Syrian presidential elections, and to a sum of £700 sent to a CDF members by a relative resident in Europe for his private use.

Aktham Nu'aysa was among 30 prisoners of conscience and political prisoners released in May 1998, apparently following a presidential amnesty. An official medical commission was reported to have visited the prisoners, before the news of their release came to light.

It is not yet clear whether the five other CDF members, Muhammad 'Ali Habib, Thabit Murad, 'Afif Muzhir, Nizar Nayyuf and Bassam al-Shaykh, serving prison sentences have also been released. Media reports suggest that more than 300 additional prisoners may have been released though this has not yet been officially confirmed.

Among those released were prisoners of conscience Riad al-Turk and Khalil Brayez, who served prison sentences of over 18 and 27 years respectively.

Amnesty International will update the Urgent Action network as soon further information is available. No further action is required by the Urgent Action network. Many thanks to all who took part in this appeal.