

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/010/2005

11 March 2005

Further Information on UA 155/04(MDE 24/038/2004, 26 April 2004) and follow-ups (MDE 24/040/2004, 17 May 2004; MDE 24/059/2004, 1 September 2004; and MDE 24/065/2004, 5 October 2004) Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture/unfair trial

SYRIA

**Muhannad al-Dabas (m)] university students
Muhammad 'Arab (m)]**

On 6 March, students Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab were sentenced to three years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for their peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and association.

The two men were arrested on 24 April 2004 after a sit-down protest organized by students at the University of Damascus against a new government policy ending guaranteed employment of engineering graduates by the state. Nine others arrested in connection with the protest were released on 9 May 2004. At least seven of these reported that they had been tortured in detention. Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab reportedly refused to sign a commitment not to take part in any activities except for those organized by the pro-government student organization. They were convicted of "opposing the objectives of the revolution".

Their trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), which began on 26 September 2004, was grossly unfair. The men were convicted on the basis of "confessions" which their lawyer claimed were obtained "as a result of beatings and psychological torture". They were denied access to their lawyer outside the courtroom, and they have no right of appeal to a higher court. They remain imprisoned at Adra Prison, just outside the capital Damascus. After two months' incommunicado detention they are reportedly now permitted monthly, 30-minute visits from family members.

Many thanks to all who took action on this case. Amnesty International will now use longer-term campaigning methods on behalf of Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab. If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab have been sentenced to three years' imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial before the SSSC;
- calling for Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- expressing concern at reports that Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab were beaten and psychologically tortured in detention;
- calling upon the authorities to investigate these allegations, and to prosecute anyone found to have tortured or ill-treated these men, in line with their obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture to which they are a state party;
- urging the authorities to allow Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab immediate and unrestricted access to their families and to any medical treatment they may need.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
President

Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh
Al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency General Ghazi Kan'an
Minister of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: 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 22 April 2005.