

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / Middle East Program
Date: 1 July 1999

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari (f)
SYRIA**

Theme: prisoner of conscience / health concern

Summary

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari who remains in detention in Syria despite the fact that her six-year prison sentence expired on 10 February 1999. Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari had been sentenced in connection with membership of a banned organization, the Party of Communist Action.

Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari began a hunger strike in 'Adra Prison on 10 June 1999 in protest at being kept in prison beyond the expiry of her sentence. Amnesty International is concerned for her well-being and is urging the authorities to provide Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari with adequate medical care while she remains in detention and to arrange her prompt release.

Background

Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari was sentenced in an unfair trial to six years' imprisonment by the Syrian Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) for her alleged involvement with the unauthorized Party for Communist Action (PCA). She had been in hiding for several years when the Political Security Department arrested her in February 1993, and after her arrest she was held incommunicado for two months and reportedly ill-treated.

At least five other prisoners of conscience are still detained in Syria after the expiry of their sentences. In the past some political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, have been held for up to 13 years after their sentences expired. In a letter to Amnesty International last year the authorities confirmed that her sentence was due to end on 10 February 1999.

Prison conditions in Syria fall seriously short of international human rights standards and torture and ill-treatment of detainees is routine, particularly during the interrogation stage of detention.

Recommended actions: see over

Recommended Actions

Urgent appeals are requested from health professionals to the addresses below:

- introducing yourself as a member of Amnesty International's health professional network
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari as a prisoner of conscience
- noting that Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari's prison sentence was due to end on 10 February 1999
- expressing concern at reports that Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari has started a hunger strike in protest at her detention beyond the expiry date of her sentence and that her health may be deteriorating
- urging the authorities to provide Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari with access to medical care while she remains in detention

ADDRESSES

His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President al-Assad,
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telexes: 419160 prespl sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

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

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

His Excellency
Dr Iyad al-Shatti
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Please also send **copies** to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.