

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 24/17/96  
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To: Health professionals  
Syria coordinators and coordination groups  
From: Medical Office / East Mediterranean sub-regional team  
Date: 20 December 1996

***MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***  
**Sick prisoners**  
**SYRIA**

**Keywords**

Theme: ill-treatment, denial of medical care, prisoners of conscience  
Profession/association:

**Summary**

AI is concerned about the health of at least 20 prisoners in Sednaya prison in the Syrian capital Damascus. The organization is urging that they be provided with adequate health care and that those held as prisoners of conscience be released unconditionally. See the attached details.

**Recommended Actions**

- 1) Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses given below:
  - expressing concern about the state of health of 20 prisoners in Sednaya prison (you should list the prisoners' names)
  - urging that they be medically examined to determine their medical needs and that they be provided with all necessary medical care
  - seeking assurances that the diet of the detainees will be monitored to ensure that it is adequate
  - urging that those whose imprisonment is based solely on their political beliefs and not on any criminal activity should be immediately released
  - stating your belief that all prisoners in Syria should have access to adequate diet and medical care in conformity with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners
  - inviting a response

**Addresses - see over**

**Addresses**

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

His Excellency  
Dr Muhammad Harba  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams:** Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria  
**Telex:** 411016 AFIRS SY  
**Fax:** +963 11222 3428

His Excellency  
Husayn Hassun  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

The prison director  
Sednaya prison  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**COPIES TO:**

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

and Syrian diplomatic representatives in your own country.

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## SYRIA: Sick prisoners

Amnesty International has long-standing concerns about political prisoners in Syria. Since the implementation of a state of emergency in 1963, critics or opponents of the Syrian government have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without trial or subjected to unfair trial and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. Prison conditions are poor and access to health care is believed to be extremely limited. AI has worked for the release of large numbers of prisoners of conscience in Syria since the 1980s. These have included many health professionals detained in 1980 (see MDE 24/06/95, 19 June 1995 and MDE 24/11/96, 31 December 1995).

In the 1990s there have been large-scale releases of prisoners under presidential amnesties. Following news of a large-scale amnesty at the end of November 1995, Amnesty International learned that 1,200 political prisoners have been released in Syria. The releases marked the anniversary of President al-Assad's 25th year in power.

In the chart below, details are given of 20 Syrian prisoners held in Sednaya prison in Damascus and reported to AI to be in need of medical care. Most were detained in connection with membership of the unauthorised political party *Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i* (Party of Communist Action: PCA). Some have been adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience as they have neither used nor advocated violence and have not been imprisoned for any identifiable criminal act. AI considers the others possible prisoners of conscience.

Medical care in Syrian prisons is believed to be inadequate and many prisoners are thought to be suffering from a variety of medical problems and diseases. AI is urging the Syrian authorities to provide details of the current state of health and legal situation of the prisoners listed in Table 1 and to free those considered by AI to be prisoners of conscience. It is further urging the Syrian authorities to guarantee adequate medical care to all those listed as well as all prisoners held in Syrian prisons.

### - Sick prisoners believed to be in Sednaya Prison

Name	Summary of information
1. Wajih Ghanim	Born 1952, married with one daughter, formerly a dock labourer. He was previously detained in 1979. Following his arrest on 11 August 1987 he was tortured on <i>al-Kursi al-almani</i> ("German chair") —a device which causes bending of the spine and severe strain on the cervical spine. Reported to suffer from degenerative spine disease.

2. Muhammad Ghanim Born 1962 in Lataqiyya; electrical engineer. He was arrested on 28 October 1987 and was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in 1994. Reported to suffer from kidney failure.
3. Ghassan Muflih Born 1960 in Dar'a, single, graduate in economics from Aleppo University. He was arrested on 3 September 1987 and sentenced on 17 October 1993 to 15 years' imprisonment. Reported to suffer from prostate problems.
4. Muhammad Salih Born 1948 in al-Murayqib; teacher, married. He was previously detained in 1980. Arrested on 1 September 1987. Reported to suffer paralysis caused by torture, to have an ulcer and to experience lung problems.
5. Munir Sha'bu Born 1963 in Lataqiyya; agricultural engineer. He was arrested 17 October 1987 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 17 October 1993. Reported to suffer from degenerative disease of cervical spine
6. Bahjat Sha'bu Arrested February 1992. He was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment in August 1995. Reported to have an ulcer and "inflammation of the stomach".
7. 'Adnan Hosni (Hassan\*) Arrested 1987. Reported to have pre-cancerous cysts in bladder.
8. 'Abd al-Halim Rumieh Born in 1954 in Latakiyya. Was an electrical engineering student. Previously had been detained from 1978 to 1980. Was arrested in February 1982 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 28 June 1983. Has been adopted by AI as a prisoner of conscience. Reported to have an ulcer and problems with eyesight.
9. Nabil Ibrahim Born in 1952 in Lataqiya. Was arrested on 16 July 1984 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Has been adopted by AI as a POC. Reported to be suffering degenerative spine disease and disc problems.
10. Ziyad Zawba'a Born 1963 in al-Suwayda. Was a student of commerce at Damascus University when arrested on 31 August 1987. Was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on 17 October 1993. Reported to suffer from degenerative disease of cervical spine.
11. Fateh Jamus Born in 1948 in Lataqiyya. Was arrested in February 1982. Was a mechanical engineer; sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 11 January 1994. Adopted by AI as a POC. Reported to suffer degenerative spine disease, disc problems, and headaches of unknown origin.
12. 'Abbas Mahmoud 'Abbas Married, with 5 children. Was arrested in January 1982 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in January 1994. He had previously been detained in 1978 and 1980. Adopted by AI as a POC. Was tortured and suffered peritonitis. Reported to suffer chronic inflammation in urinary tract and asthma.
13. Faraj Ahmad Birqdar Born in 1951/2 in Homs; married with one child. Was arrested in March 1987 and held incommunicado for nearly more than six years before being sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment on 17 October 1993. Adopted by AI as a POC (see MDE 24/09/95). Reported to have a heart problem, a spinal injury," inflammation of

- the liver” and a deformed pelvis  
[See prison poems of Faraj Ahmad Birqdar attached to this action]
14. ‘Adnan bin Yusuf Bahluli  
Born in 1950 in Lataqiyya. Married has one child. Was a skilled worker in timber company. Arrested in March 1982 and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment on 28 June 1993. Adopted by AI as a POC. Reported to suffer from epilepsy.
15. Rustum Ahmad Rustum  
Born in 1953 in Lataqiyya. Married with one child. Was arrested in June 1982 and sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment on 24 June 1993. Adopted by AI as a POC. Reported to have a blood disorder.
16. Kamal Sharif (Shouraiqi\*)  
Arrested in 1987.  
Reported to suffer from chronic eye inflammation and an ulcer
17. Malek Murshid As’ad\*  
Arrested in 1982.  
Reported to suffer from “inflammation of (and “wax” [fat?] in) the liver”
18. ‘Adnan Mahfud  
Born in 1958 in Hama. Married with one daughter. Was an electrical engineer when arrested on 1 September 1987. Was sentenced to 15 years’ imprisonment in August 1995.  
Reported to suffer partial paralysis in face and hands and “inflammation of liver”.
19. Rashid al-Sattuf  
Born in 1959 in al-Raqqa. Previously held in Tadmur. Was arrested on 28 April 1987.  
Reported to suffer serious heart disease.
20. Nazar Maradini  
Born in 1959 in Damascus. Married with two daughters. Electrical engineer and lecturer at Damascus university. Was arrested on 19 September 1987.  
Reported to suffer from an injured pelvis due to severe torture.

\* Names are as reported to AI. Those marked with asterisk may not be totally accurate.

**Deux poésies de Faraj Ahmad Birqdar<sup>1</sup>**  
(Traduits de l' Arabe)

**Hurlement**

Nous deux, nul autre :  
Un cadavre penché sur demain,  
Avec moi, près de moi.

La ville est une mère incapable  
D'arrêter la mort lente,  
Une étoile incapable  
De m'enfanter

Qui frappe à la porte?  
Apportez-vous ma dépouille  
Ou celle de l'étudiant d'en face?

Le vent passe la corde au cou  
De la neutralité céleste,  
Quant à la rivière...

Qui frappe à la porte?  
Depuis vos massacres,  
Nous sommes absents.

La peur claque la fenêtre,  
Voici la peur massive,  
La peur inamovible.

J'aurais voulu m'adosser  
A ce mur, à cette pierre...  
Mais rien que l'erg aride.

Alors je vais hurler...  
Le loup de l'erg m'entendra.  
Il saura me répondre.

Loup, ô loup pleure avec moi.  
La terre n'est pas un cachot,  
Mais tu es seul et triste.

Pour moi, pas de merles bleus,  
Et le vent nous sépare!  
Que s'est-il passé, mon ami?

Un jour, un cadavre  
s'est penché sur demain,  
Un cadavre... près de moi.

**Une histoire**

Il était une fois  
Un jour parmi les jours  
Et ce jour m'a dit...  
Prends le feu pour guide,  
Prends assez de feu, car la route  
Est longue, impraticable.  
  
Qu'importe si le désespoir  
Frappe à ta porte.  
Essaie de te lever,  
Écris sur les murs  
Simplement, sans fioritures  
«Cet homme est désespéré»...  
Et dis à ton maître le sultan  
Que ta cellule n'est pas plus étroite que  
sa tombe,  
Ni plus durable que sa vie,  
Pour autant que la terre accueille  
Son cadavre  
Les pieds devant  
Escorté par l'oubli.

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His Arabic name is also transliterated as: Farag Pier Kadar. It is under this name that the above poems were published.