

PUBLIC

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Fear of torture/Incommunicado detention/Legal concern

20 May 2003

SYRIA / LEBANON

Hanna Chalita (m) aged 48

On 10 May, Hanna Chalita, a member of the unauthorised Lebanese Forces Party (LFP), was arrested at the Syrian-Lebanese border. He has since been held incommunicado, reportedly at the Palestine Branch Detention Centre in Damascus where torture and ill-treatment of political detainees is routine. Hanna Chalita's lawyer approached the Syrian authorities regarding his client on 12 May, but was denied access to him.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned about Hanna Chalita's mental and physical safety given that he was previously detained for eight years without sentence or trial in the Lebanese Ministry of Defence Detention Centre. He was detained in connection with his alleged involvement in the assassination of member of Lebanese Parliament, Tony Frenjeh and his family in 1978. Hanna Chalita was released in August 2002.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hanna Chalita was reportedly subjected to different forms of torture and ill-treatment while in detention (1994-2002) at the Ministry of Defence Detention Centre in al-Yarze, Beirut, including electric shocks, being suspended from the ceiling, solitary confinement and suffering prolonged sleep deprivation. Following his release on bail in 2002, Hanna Chalita travelled to Australia and then returned to Lebanon early in May 2003.

Outlawed in 1994, the LFP is opposed to the Syrian military presence in Lebanon. LFP members are routinely arrested, often for engaging in political activities critical of the authorities. Syria has in the past arrested and detained hundreds of Lebanese nationals and held them incommunicado for up to 15 years. Scores of Lebanese nationals who were arrested by the Syrian Intelligence forces in Lebanon and transferred to Syria during and after the civil war still remain held, and there are fears that they may have been tortured or ill-treated.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, French or your own language:

To the Syrian authorities:

- calling for the release and safe return to Lebanon of Hanna Chalita unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling for the confirmation of the whereabouts of Hanna Chalita and seeking assurances that he is being well-treated and not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to allow him immediate and unrestricted access to his family, lawyer and whatever medical care he may require.

To the Lebanese authorities:

- urging the Lebanese authorities to intervene on behalf of Hanna Chalita and to ensure his immediate and safe return to Lebanon where he may be brought to trial in accordance with international standards for fair trial, if he is to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

Syrian authorities:

His Excellency
President Bashar al-Assad

Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 prespl sy
Fax: +96311 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Maj-Gen Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY
Fax: +96311 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

Lebanese Authorities

His Excellency President Emile Lahoud
Office of the President
Ba=abda Palace
Ba=abda, Beirut
Lebanon
Telegram: President Lahoud, Beirut, Lebanon
Fax: + 961 1 425 391
Telex: 21000
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Elias al-Murr
Minister of Interior and Municipal Affairs
Ministry of Interior and Municipal Affairs
Grand Sérail
Rue des Arts et Métiers
Sanayeh, Beirut
Lebanon
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Beirut, Lebanon
Fax: +961 1 751 622/23
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Bahij Tabbara
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Rue Sami Solh
Beirut
Lebanon
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Beirut, Lebanon
Fax: +961 1 862 622
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of Lebanon and Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 1 July 2003.