

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/023/2004

26 March 2004

UA 129/04 Possible prisoner of conscience/torture and ill-treatment/medical concern

SYRIA Hassan Watfi (m), born 1964

Human rights activist Hassan Watfi was reportedly arrested in the early hours of 16 March 2004 by political security officers. He was taken from his home in the area of Masiyf on the outskirts of Hama, in central Syria. He is held at the Military Intelligence Centre in the capital, Damascus, and it seems that he is held incommunicado. This puts him in grave danger of torture and other ill-treatment.

Hassan Watfi is an active member of the Syria-based Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR), and Amnesty International is concerned that this may be the reason for his arrest. If so, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs.

He is believed to suffer from a chronic heart disorder.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly voiced its concerns over the detention of human rights defenders and others exercising their right to freedom of expression in Syria. People detained incommunicado have frequently been tortured. Hundreds of Syrian Kurds are reported to be detained incommunicado following clashes between Kurds and Arabs at a football match in Qamishli on 12 March 2004, and are at grave risk of torture (see UA 110/04, MDE 24/019/2004, 16 March 2004).

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

- asking why Hassan Watfi has been arrested;
- expressing concern that Hassan Watfi appears to be a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely for his human rights activism, and calling for him to be released immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried in accordance with international standards for fair trial proceedings;
- expressing concern that Hassan Watfi reportedly suffers from a chronic heart condition and urging the authorities to allow him immediate access to adequate medical treatment;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that Hassan Watfi will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated during his detention;
- urging that Hassan Watfi be given immediate access to a lawyer and visits from his relatives.

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 Major General 'Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Telex: 411016 AFIRS SY
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES 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 7 May 2004.