

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/027/2005

19 May 2005

UA 131/05 Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/possible prisoner of conscience

SYRIA **Sheikh Mohammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi (m) aged 48, Kurdish imam and Islamic scholar**

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Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, an imam or Islamic religious leader, is reportedly being detained incommunicado at an unknown location and may be tortured or ill-treated in detention. The Syrian authorities have reportedly denied that they are holding him. If his detention is confirmed, Amnesty International will consider him to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for expressing his beliefs.

Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi "disappeared" after leaving the Centre for Islamic Studies in the capital Damascus on 10 May. He reportedly received a telephone call asking him to visit a sick man, and has not been seen since setting off to see him.

A well-known religious scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi is a critic of violence and terrorism and an outspoken and popular figure within the Kurdish community. He is an imam in the predominantly Kurdish city of Qamishli, in north-eastern Syria, and recently called for reforms in Syria and for more dialogue between religious groups. In February and March 2005 he travelled to Norway, Brussels and Germany, apparently in connection with his work on building relations between the EU and the Kurdish community. During his visit he was interviewed by several TV channels.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

More than 2,000 people, almost all of them Kurds, are believed to have been arrested in the wake of March 2004 clashes (see Amnesty International report, *Syria: Kurds in the Arab Republic one year after the March 2004 events*, MDE 24/002/2005, March 2005). Most of these were held incommunicado at unknown locations, and about 100 remain in detention in spite of the Presidential Amnesty issued at the end of March 2005 when 312 Kurds were ordered released. Amnesty International has documented widespread reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children. At least five Kurds have reportedly died as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody since March 2004.

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

- expressing concern that Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi is reportedly being held incommunicado at an unknown location;
- calling for his whereabouts to be disclosed, and for assurances that he is not being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;
- reminding the authorities that torture is, as stated by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture, "most frequently practised during incommunicado detention [which] should be made illegal, and persons held incommunicado should be released without delay";
- reminding the authorities that as a state party to the Convention Against Torture, Syria is obliged to review all of its legislation and practices in line with the requirements of the Convention, and ensure that all its provisions are fully implemented;
- urging that Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi be allowed visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require;

-calling for Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi' to be released immediately unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad  
President of the Republic  
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 Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 222 3428**  
**Email: somi@net.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 30 June 2005.