

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/032/2003

04 September 2003

UA 261/03 Fear of torture or ill-treatment/possible prisoner of conscience/legal concern

**SYRIA** Khalil Sulayman (m), aged 44, agricultural engineer and Kurdish activist

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Kurdish activist Khalil Sulayman is being detained incommunicado in the capital Damascus. He is at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his political beliefs.

Khalil Sulayman, an agricultural engineer, was arrested by military intelligence personnel on 30 August at his workplace at the Department of Agriculture in the village of Tell al-Dhaman, in the Governate of Aleppo. No warrant was issued for his arrest. He was then reportedly taken to Damascus, where he is apparently being held at a Military Intelligence detention centre.

No reasons have been given for Khalil Sulayman's arrest and it is not yet known whether any charges have been brought against him. Amnesty International is not aware of any recognizably criminal offence committed by Khalil Sulayman and considers his arrest and detention to be without due legal process.

Khalil Sulayman is known to have been involved in politics and was nominated as an independent candidate in the 1994 parliamentary elections. He was then reportedly subjected to harassment and was transferred to a new place of employment 240km from his home. His arrest and detention appears to form part of an ongoing pattern of repressive measures by the Syrian authorities against Syrian Kurdish activists.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The arrest and detention of Khalil Sulayman appears to form part of an ongoing pattern of repressive measures by the Syrian authorities against Syrian Kurdish activists. In the past, Kurdish activists have often been victims of torture and police brutality in Syria. During the last two years, at least two Kurds have died in custody, apparently as a result of torture and police brutality. The latest victim was Khalil Mustafa, who died in August after reportedly being tortured at the Military Intelligence Detention Centre in Aleppo. Amnesty International received information indicating that his body was missing an eye, and had other severe injuries, including a leg broken in two places, a head wound and bruising.

Scores of Kurdish activists have been arrested and detained during the years for the peaceful expression of grievances suffered by the Kurdish community in Syria. Among them are prisoners of conscience Marwan 'Uthman and Hassan Saleh who, as a result of participation in a peaceful demonstration in Damascus, were detained and later referred to the Supreme State Security Court on charges including "inciting sectarian strife" and "attempting to sever a part of the Syrian territories" (see UA 266/02, MDE 24/012/2002, 18 December 2002, and follow-ups). They are reportedly held at 'Adra prison, near Damascus.

Seven other Syrian Kurdish men have been detained incommunicado and without charge since 25 June 2003, when they participated in a peaceful protest outside the Damascus headquarters of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. They are reportedly still being held at Mezze Police Station in Damascus and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention. They may also be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression (see UA 188/03, MDE 24/021/2003, 26 June 2003).

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Khalil Sulayman, detained incommunicado since 30 August;

- seeking assurances that he be treated humanely in detention, and will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that he be given immediate and unrestricted access to relatives, lawyers and any medical treatment he may need;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Khalil Sulayman as a possible prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his political beliefs;
- expressing grave concern at reports of torture and death in custody of Kurds in Syria and calling for an independent investigation into all allegations of torture and police brutality, with the results of the investigation made public and those found to be responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in accordance with international human rights standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a state party.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad  
 President of the Republic  
 Presidential Palace  
 Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegram:**      **President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax:**            **+ 963 11 332 3410**  
**Telex:**          **419160 prespl sy**  
**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 16 October 2003.