

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN KURD PERSECUTED AFTER FORCIBLE RETURN

Berzani Karro, a Syrian Kurdish man and possible prisoner of conscience, is reported to have been tortured while being held incommunicado for three months after his forcible return to Syria from Cyprus in June. He is now known to be in 'Adra prison in Damascus, the capital of Syria.

Berzani Karro, aged 20, was reportedly subjected to prolonged beatings while in the custody of the al-Fayha Political Security Branch in Damascus, after his arrest on 27 June at Damascus airport. Political Security is one of several security services operating in Syria, all of which regularly detain individuals on even the slightest suspicion of opposition to the regime. Towards the end of September, after three months of incommunicado detention, with no access to his family or legal representation, Berzani Karro was moved to 'Adra prison. His family are being allowed to visit him every two to three weeks.

On 10 November a military court charged Berzani Karro with "attempting to sever part of the Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state" and involvement in an unauthorized organization. Amnesty International believes that Berzani Karro may be a prisoner of conscience, held due to his perceived political opinion. The charges against him are commonly used against Kurds who are deemed to be politically active and critical of the state.

Prior to his current detention, Berzani Karro was detained for around two and a half months when he was 15 years old. He was accused of attending an unauthorized demonstration and destroying state property, including a statue of President Bashar al-Assad. His family say he was at home at the time of the protest. He was held for at least some of that time in the Military Intelligence-run Palestine Branch detention centre, where detainees are regularly tortured. At the Palestine Branch, he was subjected to the *dulab* (the tyre), whereby he was forced through a car tyre suspended from the ceiling and beaten. There were 10 others detained with him, all of them under 18.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to release Berzani Karro immediately and unconditionally, if he is held solely due to his perceived political opinion;
- Expressing concern that Berzani Karro faces a trial before a military court, particularly given that trial proceedings before such courts routinely breach international fair standards;
- Calling for an independent investigation into the allegation that Berzani Karro was tortured during incommunicado detention, for the results to be made public and those responsible to be brought to justice.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 JANUARY 2010 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 Al-Rashid Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Major Sa'id Mohammed Sammour
 Ministry of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Email: somi@net.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Defence
 Lieutenant-General Ali Ben-Mohammed
 Ministry of Defence
 Omayyad Square
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 211 9729 / 223 7842
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 257/09 (MDE 24/024/2009). Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/024/2009/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In Syria anyone perceived as being in any way associated with Kurdish political parties or groups that raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention and in many cases to torture or other ill-treatment.

Berzani Karro left Syria in October 2006 and travelled to Cyprus where he claimed asylum. His application was rejected and he was detained in September 2008, on the grounds that he had no legal right to remain in the country. On his forcible return to Syria, Cypriot officials escorted him on the plane, and handed him over to the Syrian authorities at Damascus airport. Amnesty International wrote to the Cypriot Ministers of Foreign Affairs in October expressing concern about Berzani Karro's case and requesting information concerning his access to administrative and judicial proceedings relating to his asylum application and his forcible return to Syria. The organization also asked the Cypriot authorities to seek information from the Syrian authorities as to Berzani Karro's whereabouts after his arrest and assurances that he was not being tortured or otherwise ill-treated. To date, there has been no response.

Amnesty International has serious concerns about the fairness of trials before military courts in Syria. Cases are often based on vaguely worded charges that are interpreted extremely broadly by the Syrian authorities, and "confessions" obtained through torture or other ill-treatment are frequently accepted as evidence. In addition, the rights of the defendant to attend the trial and to present a defence with or without the assistance of legal representation are often not respected.

Further information on UA: 257/09 Index: MDE 24/035/2009 Issue Date: 27 November 2009

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