

PUBLIC

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Fear of forcible return

SYRIA

Faleh 'Abdullah al-Mansuri (m), aged 60, President of the Ahwazi Liberation Organisation (ALO), Dutch national
Rasool Mezrea' (m), ALO member
Taher 'Ali Mezra' (m), aged 40
Jamal 'Abdawi (m)
Musa Suwari (m), aged 32, university student
Ahmad 'Abd al-Jaber Abiat (m), aged 20, student
Jamal Obeidi (m), aged 34, student and Chair of Ahwazi Student Union in Syria
'Issa Yassin al-Musawi (m), aged 30, university student

The eight Iranian Arab activists named above were arrested in the capital, Damascus, on 11 May and are held incommunicado at an unknown location, where they are at risk of torture and of being forcibly returned to Iran, where they would face persecution and possibly the death penalty. A number of other Arab activists were reportedly arrested with them, including one man who has already been returned to Iran.

Most of them men are said to be UN-recognised refugees and one of them, Faleh 'Abdullah al-Mansuri, is also a Dutch national. They were reportedly arrested at the house of Rasool Mezrea', by officers of Political Security.

One other Iranian Arab, Sa'id 'Awda al-Saki, was arrested at the same time and has reportedly been returned to Iran. He is at risk of being sentenced to death because of his activities in defence of the rights of Iran's Arab minority.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Iranian Arabs, known as Ahwazis, live mostly in the Khuzestan region, which borders Iraq. It is strategically important because it is the site of much of Iran's oil reserves. The Arab population do not feel they have benefited as much from the oil revenue as the Persian population; historically they have been marginalised and discriminated against, for instance being denied the right to an education in their own language.

Tension has mounted within the Arab population since April 2005, after it was alleged that the government planned to disperse the country's Arab population or to force them to relinquish their Arab identity. Since then, hundreds of Iranian Arabs have been detained (See UA 91/05, MDE 13/014/2005, 18 April 2005; UA 222/05, MDE 13/048/2005, 26 August 2005).

Following bomb explosions in Ahwaz City in June and October 2005, which killed at least 14 people, and explosions at oil installations in September and October, the cycle of violence intensified, with hundreds of people reportedly arrested. Further bombings on 24 January 2006, in which at least six people were killed, were followed by further mass arrests. Two men, Mehdi Nawaseri and Ali Awdeh Afrawi, were executed in public on 2 March after they were convicted of involvement in the October bombings. Their executions followed unfair trials before a Revolutionary Court during which they are believed to have been denied access to lawyers, and their confessions, along with those of six other men, were broadcast on television.

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

- expressing concern that the eight men named above (naming them) are facing forcible return to Iran, where they would be at risk of torture, ill-treatment or the death penalty, and calling on the authorities to ensure that are not returned to Iran, either directly or via any third country;
- expressing concern that the eight men are being held incommunicado at an unknown location where they are at risk of torture, and calling on the authorities to allow them immediate access to lawyers of their own choosing, their families and any medical treatment they may require.

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

Ministry of Interior
His Excellency Major General Bassam Abdel Magid
Minister of Interior
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 2223428
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 3327620
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 26 June 2006.