

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/058/2006

2 October 2006

Further Information on UA 73/06 (MDE 24/028/2006, 31 March 2006) and follow-up (MDE 24/035/2006, 10 May 2006) - Incommunicado detention/Prisoners of conscience

SYRIA

**'Ali al-'Abdullah (m) aged around 55, journalist
Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m) his son, a student**

Prisoners of conscience 'Ali al-'Abdullah and his son Muhammad are reportedly being held in 'Adra prison near the capital, Damascus, after being transferred there from Sednaya prison. They have been detained for six months purely for their actions relating to the defence of human rights in Syria.

Although the cases of both men were initially before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), they were later referred to the Criminal Court, and then in June 2006 to the Military Court. Amnesty International has repeatedly raised grave concerns about the conduct of trials before military courts in Syria. They are neither independent nor impartial and in many cases defendants appear to be presumed guilty, and their rights to present a defence and have legal representation are not respected.

The charges against the two men reportedly include "broadcasting abroad false or exaggerated news which would damage the reputation of the state or its financial standing" and insulting the President of the SSSC. Muhammad al-'Abdullah also faces accusations relating to participation in a meeting which "calls for a disturbance, or shows signs of causing a general disturbance to public security, or causes riots or protests...". If convicted, they could face more than three years in prison.

Although 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah were scheduled to appear in court on 27 September, they were reportedly not taken to the hearing and their case remains pending.

On 29 September, Muhammad al-'Abdullah reportedly ended a seven-day hunger strike in protest at the judiciary's refusal to release him so that he can sit exams which begin in October. Other Syrian prisoners of conscience and human rights defenders detained in 'Adra prison were also said to have gone on hunger-strike in solidarity with his demands. As well as his father, they include Anwar al-Bunni, Michele Kilo, Kamal al-Labwani and Fateh Muhammad Jamus. (For more on the cases of these men you can visit the AI website link: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-syr/index>).

Another of 'Ali al-'Abdullah's sons, 'Omar, is also a prisoner of conscience being held incommunicado apparently in Sednaya prison (see UA 41/06, MDE 24/029/2006 and updates).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah were arrested on 23 March, the day after an incident outside the SSSC when an argument between an officer and Muhammad al-'Abdullah developed, regarding the continuing use of the State of Emergency Laws (SEL) in Syria. 'Ali al-'Abdullah was summoned to appear before the President of the SSSC who threatened to have Muhammad beaten if he attended outside the court again. 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah were outside the court alongside family members of defendants appearing before the court. Relatives of those being tried by the SSSC commonly wait outside the court when they know their relatives will be brought from their place of detention to hearings. Since family members are not known to have been admitted to the court over the years, it is a way of seeing their detained relatives and a form of peaceful protest against the SSSC, whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial. 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah reportedly intervened when some police officers harassed the families. Their intervention apparently led to the argument between the officer and Muhammad al-'Abdullah.

During 2005, 'Ali al-'Abdullah spent over five months and Muhammad al-'Abdullah spent three weeks in detention, again for peacefully expressing their opinions (see UA 139/05, MDE 24/032/2005 and follow-ups, and UA 203/05, MDE 24/056/2005 and follow-ups).

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

- calling on the authorities to release 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for their peaceful work in defence of human rights;
- reminding the authorities that 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah are entitled to regular access to their lawyer, their family and any medical attention they may require;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah before the Military Court must comply with international standards for fair trial;
- urging the authorities to allow people to freely exercise the peaceful expression of their views and reminding them that Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens; and that Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party, affirms the right to enjoy freedoms of opinion and expression.

APPEALS TO:

(Please note that it may be difficult to get through to the fax numbers; please keep trying)

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General
Hassan Ali Turkmani
Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: +963 11 223 7842

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 11 332 7620

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 13 November 2006.