

PUBLIC

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15 November 2006

UA 305/06 **Fear of torture or ill-treatment**

SYRIA **Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi (m)**

On 13 November 2006, Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi, a Syrian Kurdish activist, was arrested on Syria's border with Jordan as he attempted to flee the country. His father, a prominent Kurdish imam, was killed after "disappearing" and being tortured last year. Amnesty International fears that Murad al-Khiznawi is at risk of torture, ill-treatment, or even death.

Murad al-Khiznawi and his brother Murshid al-Khiznawi have campaigned for an investigation into the death of their father, Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, who died on 30 May 2005, 20 days after "disappearing" in the capital, Damascus (see UA 131/05, MDE 24/027/2005, 19 May 2005, and follow-up). According to reports, his death resulted from torture while he was held by agents of Syrian Military Intelligence at an unknown location. His body was handed over to his family on 1 June and was escorted by ten Military Intelligence cars on its way from Damascus to his home town, Qamishli. Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi was a critic of violence and terrorism who had spoken out in support of the rights of Syrian Kurds, political reform and greater dialogue between religious groups. In February and March 2005 he had travelled to Norway, Belgium and Germany, apparently as part of his efforts to build links between the European Union and Syria's Kurdish community.

In October 2006, a warrant for the arrest of Murshid al-Khiznawi was issued by the Syrian authorities, leading him to flee to Jordan. Murshid al-Khiznawi had reportedly accused Maher al-Assad, the head of Syria's Presidential Guard and the brother of the Syrian President, of involvement in the assassination of his father. Murad al-Khiznawi was arrested while attempting to join him. It is not known where Murad al-Khiznawi is detained. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his views.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture is widespread in Syrian detention and investigation centres, particularly during pre-trial detention, and during periods of incommunicado detention. Over the years, Amnesty International has documented 38 types of torture and ill-treatment used against detainees in Syria. "Confessions" extracted under duress are systematically used as "evidence" in Syrian courts, and the defendants' claims that they have been tortured are almost never investigated.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest of Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi on 13 November;
- calling for guarantees that Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi will be well-treated, and not tortured or ill-treated, while in custody;
- reminding the authorities that Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi has the right to immediate and unrestricted access to his family, a lawyer, and any medical treatment he may need;
- calling on the authorities either to charge Sheikh Murad al-Khiznawi with a recognisably criminal offence or to release him immediately, as he appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his views.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad

President

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 27 December 2006.