

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Syria: Witness in Hariri case held for four years without charge

Amnesty International is urging Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to order the release of Ziad Ramadan unless he is to be given a prompt, fair trial. Ziad Ramadan has been detained without charge or trial since his arrest precisely four years ago – on 20 July 2005. It is thought that he may be currently held at the Palestine Branch of Syrian Military Intelligence, where torture and other ill-treatment of detainees is common. He has not been permitted to see his family since September 2007, raising serious concern for his safety.

According to the Syrian authorities, Ziad Ramadan, a Syrian national, was detained in connection with the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on 14 February 2005 in Beirut. However, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the court established to try those accused of responsibility for the killing, told Amnesty International in May 2009 that it does not consider Ziad Ramadan a suspect, but simply as a witness because of his association with someone of interest to the Tribunal's investigation, and has not requested his detention.

Prior to the assassination of Rafic Hariri, Ziad Ramadan had been a work colleague in Lebanon of Ahmed Abu 'Adas, a Beirut resident who appeared in a video making a confession of responsibility for the killing on behalf of a previously unknown militant group. The video was broadcast by Al-Jazeera on the day of the assassination, but a UN fact-finding mission indicated in March 2005 that there was little or no evidence available to support Ahmed Abu 'Adas' statement.

Ziad Ramadan was interviewed by the Lebanese authorities following the broadcasting of the video, but was released soon afterwards. He then returned to Syria, where he was detained by Military Intelligence officials on 20 July 2005. He was held incommunicado at the Palestine Branch detention centre for six months before being moved to prison in Homs. He was returned to the Palestine Branch in September 2007, where it is presumed he is still being held, although there has been no official confirmation of his current whereabouts.

In February 2009, responding to a joint intervention by the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD), the Syrian authorities said Ziad Ramadan could face trial in Syria on terrorism-related charges once he had appeared before the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. To date, however, no charges are known to have been brought against him and, four years after his arrest, he remains held without access to his family or a lawyer of his own choosing, and without any means to challenge his continuing detention or obtain effective remedy.

Amnesty International wrote to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad regarding the case of Ziad Ramadan on 17 July 2009. It had written on 2 June 2008 to then Defence Minister Hassan Ali Turkmani with similar concerns, but received no response.

Amnesty International considers it to be high time that Ziad Ramadan is released unless he is to be brought to trial promptly and fairly on recognizable criminal charges.

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For more information please contact Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org