

# URGENT ACTION

## SYRIAN KURD TORTURED IN CUSTODY

**'Abdelbaqi Khalaf is being tortured or otherwise ill-treated, according to reliable sources. Every few weeks, they say, he is taken from Damascus Central prison in 'Adra, northern Damascus, to a branch of State Security, where officers are trying to force him to "confess" to something which he maintains is not true.**

An unknown number of other Kurds have been detained in connection with the same case, including three brothers, **Munther, Nedal and Riad Ahmed**, who are all being held in the same prison. According to exiled Syrian Kurdish activists, 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf, the three Ahmed brothers and up to dozens of other Kurdish detainees are being held in connection with the investigation into the killing of two Syrian soldiers or intelligence officers in the north-eastern city of Qamishli in early 2008. Syrian Kurdish exiles maintain that the interrogators are trying to make 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf "confess" to being the secretary of the political wing of an organisation which the Syrian authorities suspect may have been involved in the killings. The Kurdish sources all state that 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf can have had no link to the killings as he has always strongly opposed violence in the struggle for greater respect for Kurdish rights. He has not yet had access to legal counsel, and has not been brought before a court. His family hired a lawyer for him, but the prison authorities would not let the lawyer meet with 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf when he went to the prison.

Until late 2009 or early 2010, 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf was held incommunicado at an unknown location, conditions in which torture and other ill-treatment are particularly common. Reports indicate he was made to hang by his wrists which were shackled to the wall for the first eight days and that he was regularly subjected to other forms of ill-treatment during the first three months. 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf has received several family visits since the start of this year, but one was cancelled, apparently because he had been tortured recently, and was not in a fit state to be seen. He was last visited on 27 June. Torture and other ill-treatment are carried out widely in detention and interrogation centres in Syria. Four deaths as a possible result of torture have been reported in the last two months alone.

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

- Expressing concern at reports that 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf has been tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and has been held without charge for nearly two years;
- Urging the authorities to release immediately and unconditionally 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf and all others detained without charge in connection with the same case, unless they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences and tried promptly in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards;
- Calling on them to allow 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf and all others detained in connection with the same case immediate access to legal counsel of their own choosing, and any medical attention they may require;
- Reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which bans torture and other ill-treatment under any circumstances.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 SEPTEMBER 2010 TO:

#### 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 Lieutenant-General  
 Ali Ben-Mohammed Habib Mahmoud  
 Ministry of Defence  
 Omayyad Square  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 223 7842**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### **And copies to:**

Minister of Interior  
 His Excellency Major Sa'id Mohamed  
 Samour  
 Ministry of Interior  
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 222 3428**

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 222/09 (MDE 24/022/2009). Further information: [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/022/2009/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/022/2009/en)

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



# URGENT ACTION

## SYRIAN KURD TORTURED IN CUSTODY

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

'Abdelbaqi Khalaf was arrested by State Security officers on 11 September 2008 in front of his clothing store in Qamishli. He is an activist for democracy in Syria and political unity within the Kurdish community, and known to have frequent contact with members of various Kurdish political parties. He told friends before his arrest that he believed State Security agents were monitoring his movements. According to sources in Syria, 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf had previously been arrested by State Security officers in May 2008, and interrogated for several hours before being released without charge.

Previously a member of the Syrian Kurdish political party known as the Popular Union (Ittihad al-Sha'b), in the 1990s 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf had helped establish a clandestine library of Kurdish-language books, which are banned in Syria.

Munther, Nedal and Riad Ahmed were arrested by State Security officers at their homes in Qamishli on 3 September, 11 September and 8 October 2010 respectively. Before their arrest, Nedal and Riad Ahmed were engaged in discussions with other Kurdish activists to set up an organization to promote Kurdish culture through books, magazines and cultural events. Since 1992 at least two of them had been operating an unofficial library which lent out books on Kurdish issues in both Arabic and Kurdish and, in a limited number of cases, printed books which authors writing on Kurdish matters were unable to publish elsewhere. The brothers' activities had no connection with those of 'Abdelbaqi Khalaf.

Kurds in Syria suffer discrimination because of their ethnicity: many of them are denied Syrian nationality and therefore do not receive the same education, employment, health care and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals. Severe restrictions are placed on the use of the Kurdish language and culture: publishing and printing materials in Kurdish, as well as teaching the language, are forbidden and punishable by imprisonment. Kurdish civil society activists, and those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups who raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria, risk arbitrary arrest, torture and imprisonment after unfair trials.

Further information on UA: 222/09 Index: MDE 24/020/2010 Issue Date: 17 August 2010

