

URGENT ACTION

REFORMIST MAY BE DETAINED, RISKS TORTURE

A peaceful advocate of democratic reform in Syria, Dr Mohamed al-Ammar, went missing on his way home from work in the southern city of Dera'a, on 19 March. He is believed to be held at the Military Intelligence branch in Dera'a in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance, putting him at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Dr Mohamed al-Ammar is believed to have left the clinic where he works to drive home at around 6pm on 19 March, as usual. The journey home normally takes him around 10 minutes. According to a contact in Syria, he had still not arrived home at 9pm, and this worried his family. When they still had not heard from him the next day, members of his family went to ask about him at the local police station, but a police officer told them that no one had heard anything about Dr Mohamed al-Ammar. The family also asked at a checkpoint between the clinic and his house, which is operated by uniformed security officials believed to be Military Intelligence, but learned nothing.

The same contact has told Amnesty International that the family believes Dr Mohamed al-Ammar is being held at the Military Intelligence branch in Dera'a, after discovering from an unofficial source that he was arrested at the Military Intelligence-run checkpoint on his way home. A former detainee has told the family that he was held at this branch together with Dr Mohamed al-Ammar. He described the conditions as bad with torture and other ill-treatment being rife.

Dr Mohamed al-Ammar is a longstanding advocate of peaceful democratic reform in Syria. He has published his calls widely over the internet, has given public speeches and attended conferences. Since the start of the current unrest in Syria, he has been arrested four times in connection with his pro-reform activities. If he was indeed arrested and is being held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression, Amnesty International would consider him as a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate release.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Expressing concern that Dr Mohamed al-Ammar has been missing since 19 March and calling on the authorities to reveal immediately where he is and what has happened to him;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that, if he is detained, he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed contact with his family, a lawyer of his choice and any medical attention he may require;
- Calling on them to release Dr Mohamed al-Ammar immediately and unconditionally, if he is held solely for peacefully expressing his political opinion.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 1 JUNE 2012 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street
 Damascus,
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
 Ibrahim al-Shaar, Ministry of Interior,
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus,
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 211 9578 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus,
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 214 6253 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Largely peaceful pro-reform demonstrations began sporadically in February 2011 but became larger and more frequent after the first killings of demonstrators the following month. The protests have been largely peaceful, yet the Syrian authorities have responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. In the year since then, although peaceful demonstrations have continued, the unrest has turned increasingly violent, with armed opposition groups, many loosely under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) carrying out attacks mainly against Syrian security forces. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 8,500 people reported to have died or been killed during or in connection with the protests and related unrest since mid-March 2011. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting soldiers who have taken up arms against the government.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested in the past 12 months and many, if not most, are believed to have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has the names of more than 330 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment of former detainees. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see *"I wanted to die": Syria's torture survivors speak out* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>. Amnesty International has also received many reports of individuals apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide families with any information concerning the fate of individuals, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by security forces.

Despite the Syrian government's acceptance on 27 March 2012 of the six-point plan drawn up by the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League on Syria, Kofi Annan, and the ceasefire agreement of 12 April, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

Dr Mohamed al-Ammar was arrested for the first time in late March 2011, when he was held in solitary confinement for four days. He was released without being charged or taken before a judge. In early May, he was arrested again and accused of a variety of offences relating to his political activism. He was released as part of an amnesty in early June. Two further arrests followed in September and December 2011. His son, Suhaib al-Ammar, an English literature student, was detained from November 2011 until January 2012. He later said he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated, heightening fears for his father.

A video of one of Dr Mohamed al-Ammar's speeches calling for peaceful transition can be found here (in Arabic): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNP1uCWChE>

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic and widespread human rights violations which amount to crimes against humanity, and has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as an international arms embargo on Syria, and for an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

Name: Dr Mohamed al-Ammar
Gender m/f: m

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