

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/032/2004

UA 143/04

Fear of torture and ill-treatment/Fear of incommunicado detention

14 April 2004

SYRIA

Nijrfan Saleh Mahmoud (m)	]
Ahmad Shikhmous 'Abdallah (m)	] school children aged 12 and 13
Walat Mohammad Sa'id (m)	]
Serbest Shikhou (m)	]

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The four Kurdish school children named above were reportedly arrested by members of the political security department at al-Talane' school, in the city of Qamishli, north-eastern Syria on 6 April. They were taken to a detention centre in the town of al-Hasaka, about 80km away.

The children were reportedly ill-treated during their arrest and Amnesty International fears they may be at risk of torture or further ill-treatment. The exact location and conditions of their detention are unknown. It is also unknown whether they have been charged with any offence or granted access to their families or lawyers.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A wave of arrests, riots and killings swept Syria in March 2004 following a clash between Arab and Kurdish fans at a football match in Qamishli on 12 March. Security forces reportedly fired into the crowds, killing a number of people. At least 20 people were killed in later disturbances across the north of the country and Amnesty International has the names of more than 100 people who have been injured.

Over 2,000 people, mostly Kurds, are thought to have been arrested. Many of them are held incommunicado at unknown locations, and at least two men have reportedly died in custody. A number of people, including children, have reportedly been tortured. (See UA 110/04, MDE 24/019/2004, 16 March 2004 and Public Statement, MDE 24/029/2004, 6 April 2004)

In addition, at least 24 Kurdish students have been expelled from their universities and dormitories, and, in what appears to reflect a pattern of increasing persecution of Kurdish people, Syrian Kurds are reportedly being arrested or attacked solely on the basis of their ethnicity or for speaking Kurdish (See UA 107/04, MDE 24/018/2004, 12 March 2004).

The predominantly Kurdish areas in the north and north-east of the country lag behind the rest of the country in terms of social and economic indicators. In 2003 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated its concern at both direct and indirect discrimination against, amongst others, children belonging to minorities and/or communities in the north and north-east of Syria.

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

- expressing serious concern at the arrest and apparent incommunicado detention of the 12- and 13-year-old Kurdish schoolchildren, Nijrfan Saleh Mahmoud, Ahmad Shikhmous 'Abdallah, Walat Mohammad Sa'id and Serbest Shikhou;
- asking why they were arrested and calling for their immediate and unconditional release unless they are to be charged with a recognisably criminal offence;
- calling for them not to be ill-treated and to granted immediate access to their families, to lawyers and to any medical care they may require;

-reminding Syria of its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child including that: “the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time; “every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person, and in a manner which takes into account the needs of persons of his or her age. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to do so and shall have the right to maintain contact with his or her family through correspondence and visits, save in exceptional circumstances”; and “Every child deprived of his or her liberty shall have the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his or her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.”

**APPEALS TO:**

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

**Telegram:**     **President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax:**            **+ 963 11 332 3410**  
**Salutation:**   **Your Excellency**

His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegram:**     **Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax:**            **+ 963 11 222 3428**  
**Telex:**         **411016 AFIRS SY**  
**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 26 May 2004.