

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/067/2004

15 October 2004

Further Information on UA 188/03 (MDE 24/021/2003, 26 June 2003), and follow-ups (MDE 24/035/2003, 18 September 2003, MDE 24/049/2004, 29 June 2004) - Prisoner of conscience/torture and ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/unfair trial/medical concern

SYRIA

Mas'oud Hamid (m), student
Muhammed Mustafa (m), lawyer
Khaled Ahmed 'Ali (m)
Sherif Ramadhan (m)

Syrian Kurdish activist Mas'oud Hamid was sentenced to five years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 10 October. He is being held incommunicado in solitary confinement, which puts him in danger of torture. He is reported to have begun a hunger strike after his trial in protest at the conditions in which he is held.

He was convicted of being a member of a "secret organisation" and "attempting to sever part of Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state", charges commonly used against Kurdish activists. The two years he has already spent in prison will count towards his sentence. He is currently held in 'Adra Prison, just outside the capital, Damascus.

Mas'oud Hamid, a student of journalism at Damascus University, was arrested on 24 July 2003 after he sent photographs he had taken to several Internet sites including the German-based Kurdish site www.amude.com. The photographs were of a 25 June 2003 demonstration calling on the government to recognise the civil and political rights of Syria's Kurdish population. Mas'oud Hamid is one of several people convicted this year in Syria in relation to Internet use.

Seven other Syrian Kurds were arrested at the demonstration on 25 June 2003, three of whom – prisoners of conscience Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali - were sentenced to five years in prison, reduced immediately to two years (see previous UAs).

Amnesty International considers Mas'oud Hamid to be a prisoner of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of his views. (See AI Public Statement, *Syria: Amnesty International repeats its call for the release of five prisoners of conscience held for their peaceful use of the Internet*, MDE 24/045/2004, 17 June 2004).

Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali remain in solitary confinement in 'Adra Prison, where they are serving two-year sentences handed down in June 2004. They are believed to be held in appalling conditions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trials before the SSSC fall far short of international standards for fair trials: there are severe restrictions on the defendant's right to obtain effective legal representation and convicted prisoners have no right of appeal to a higher court. Amnesty International has voiced concerns over the years that the SSSC appears to be neither independent nor impartial. It routinely accepts "confessions" without investigating claims that they have been extracted under torture or duress.

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

- calling for Mas'oud Hamid, Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to free expression;
- expressing concern that Mas'oud Hamid is detained incommunicado in solitary confinement; also expressing concern that Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali are reportedly still detained incommunicado in solitary confinement following their trial;
- seeking assurances that Mas'oud Hamid, Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali will be treated humanely while they remain in prison, and not tortured or ill-treated;
- asking that Mas'oud Hamid, Muhammed Mustafa, Sherif Ramadhan and Khaled Ahmad 'Ali be granted access to their families and lawyers;
- expressing concern that Mas'oud Hamid is reportedly on hunger strike and urging that he be given any medical treatment he may require.

APPEALS TO:

President
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major General Ghazi Kan'an
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

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 November 2004.