

PUBLIC

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UA 114/03 Incommunicado detention/detention without charge/fear of torture or ill-treatment

SYRIA Jamal Mahmud al-WAFA'I (m), aged 44
Fayzah 'Ali SHIHAB (f), aged 47
Maha Ahmad Qarah QASH (f), aged 45
Mayyadah Muhammad Ghassan BENQASLI (f), aged 37
Fathiyyah Rajab DAMUR (f), aged 32
Muhammad 'Adnan Ahmad MADLAJ (m), aged 46
Muhammad Ahmad QASHUSH (m), aged 52

The seven people named above were arrested between 18 and 24 April while returning from exile in Iraq. They are reportedly being held incommunicado at an unknown location and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment. According to reports, they have not been charged with any offence.

Jamal Mahmud al-Wafa'i was arrested by Syrian security forces at the border checkpoint near the Syrian town of Hosaiba on 18 April. He had been in exile in Iraq since the early 1980s. Fayzah 'Ali Shihab, Maha Ahmad Qarah Qash, Mayyadah Muhammad Ghassan Benqasli, Fathiyyah Rajab Damur, Muhammad 'Adnan Ahmad Madlaj and Muhammad Ahmad Qashush, all of whom were returning Syrian exiles, were also arrested at the Syrian-Iraqi border. It is unclear whether these six people were arrested after being allowed entry into Syria or at a border check-point. It is thought that the seven may have been taken to military intelligence detention centres, where political detainees have previously been held incommunicado for long periods and tortured or ill-treated.

All seven detainees are at increased risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention because of their links to the unauthorized opposition group, the Muslim Brotherhood Organization. The armed faction of this organization was involved in violent confrontations with the Syrian security forces in the late 1970s and 1980s. In March 2002, Muhammad Hasan Nassar, a former member of the unauthorized Muslim Brotherhood Organization, died in custody after being held in incommunicado detention for a week by the Syrian authorities, following his voluntary return from exile. There were fears that he might have been tortured or ill-treated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Syria closed its border to Iraq on 14 April. It is unclear how many Syrian nationals and others are gathered at the Iraqi side of the border seeking entry to Syria. Syria has forcibly returned two groups of Iraqi refugees in recent days. On 21 April, Syria forcibly returned 32 Iraqi refugees from al Hol refugee camp near the Syrian-Iraqi border, and 12 persons were reportedly sent back to Iraq on 13 April. There are 168 Iraqi refugees currently living in al Hol refugee camp.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the seven Syrians returning from exile in Iraq, who are being detained incommunicado at an unknown location in Syria;
- calling for their immediate release unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging that they be treated humanely and not subjected to torture or ill-treatment in detention;
- calling on the authorities to disclose their whereabouts immediately and allow them immediate and unrestricted access to relatives, lawyers and any medical treatment they require;
- calling for Syria to open its borders immediately to all refugees and asylum seekers from Iraq, without discrimination.

APPEALS TO:

Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace

Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegram: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410

Telex: 419160 prespl sy

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 6 June 2003.