

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Syria: Release of political prisoner after 27 years is welcome but not enough**

Amnesty International today welcomed the release on 11 August of Haytham Na'al after over 27 years in prison in connection with his involvement with the Arab Communist Organization (ACO).

Haytham Na'al was among a group of ACO members sentenced to long prison terms or the death penalty after unfair trials before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). He was reportedly tortured and ill-treated in detention and suffers from a number of illnesses including intestinal disease, a lung condition and urinary tract disease.

"The release is a positive step. However, three other seriously-ill long term political prisoners continue to suffer behind bars," Amnesty International said.

The Syrian authorities have failed to heed repeated calls for the release of 'Imad Shiha, Faris Murad, and Mustafa Dib Khalil. The health of all three is deteriorating as a result of chronic illnesses and torture during the early stages of their detention.

'Imad Shiha and Faris Murad have been in detention since July 1975 in connection with their involvement with the Arab Communist Organization. 'Imad Shiha, born in 1954, is suffering from a number of diseases including a chronic intestinal complaint and a leg injury. Faris Murad, born in 1950, is suffering from a spinal injury, high blood pressure and has reportedly lost his teeth as a result of dental disease. He has a deeply bowed posture apparently as a result of the torture on the "German Chair"; a metal chair with moving parts which stretches the spine and causes severe pressure on the victim's neck and legs.

Both men were reportedly tortured and ill-treated to confess to the charges, which included carrying out bomb attacks. They were sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labour. The two were among others who were sentenced to death by the SSSC and executed.

Mustafa Dib Khalil (also known as Abu Ta'an), a Palestinian born in 1923, has been in detention since 1983. He reportedly has a spinal problem and is suffering from hypertension and loss of sight. He was arrested by Syrian intelligence officers on 7 November 1983 near Tripoli in northern Lebanon. His detention is believed to be connected to his involvement with the Fatah Movement as a coordinator of Palestinian guerrilla fighters in Lebanon. He is being held without trial.

These political prisoners were held for years in incommunicado detention before being allowed

access to their families. In addition, they have suffered psychologically as a result of prolonged detention and their exclusion from Presidential amnesties over the last ten years which led to the release of thousands of political prisoners. All are currently held in Sednaya Prison.

They are being held in contravention of Syria's obligations under human rights treaties and being denied specialist medical care as required by the provisions of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.

"The continued detention of these political prisoners is unjust. They must be released without delay," Amnesty International urged.

Amnesty International calls on the Syrian authorities to order independent investigations into the allegations of torture in these cases with a view to bringing any perpetrators to justice.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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