

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: MDE 24/040/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 150
28 August 2002

Syria: "Prisoners of conscience" must be released, not convicted

Amnesty International today condemned as grossly unfair the sentencing by the Supreme State Security Court of three prisoners of conscience for the peaceful exercise of their civil rights, including freedom of expression.

"The trial and sentencing of these three men falls into a pattern of systematic and flagrant violation of Syria's obligations under international human rights treaties to which it is a state party," Amnesty International said.

Today the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) sentenced Kamal Labwani, a medical doctor, to three years in prison for inciting armed rebellion; Hasan Sa'dun, a teacher, was sentenced to two years in prison for communication of false information; and FawasTello, an engineer, was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of attempting to change the Constitution by illegal means.

The three are the last of a group of ten people arrested in August and September 2001, all of whom were subsequently sentenced by the Criminal Court and the SSSC after grossly unfair trials to up to ten years in prison. Amnesty International considers them all prisoners of conscience and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

Background

In April 2001, the Human Rights Committee - the body of experts that monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR)- expressed concern about the procedures of the SSSC as incompatible with the provisions of the ICCPR to which Syria is a state party. The Committee stated that "The public nature of proceedings before the [Supreme] State Security Court is not guaranteed. The Committee is also concerned about allegations... that the Court has rejected complaints of torture, even in flagrant cases, and that some legal representatives have withdrawn in protest against the failure to respect the rights of the defence. Moreover, the Committee notes that the State Security Court's decisions are not subject to appeal".

Public Document

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