

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/12/99

6 July 1999

Further information on EXTRA 71/98 (MDE 24/14/98, 5 October) and follow ups (MDE 24/19/98, 19 October 1999 and MDE 24/22/98, 3 December 1999) - Health concern / Legal concern and new concern: Arbitrary detention

SYRIA 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian national, aged 54

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'Abd al-Majid Zaghmout is suffering from an advanced form of cancer (nasopharyngeal carcinoma). Despite his badly deteriorating health he is being denied visits from his family.

Amnesty International considers the Syrian authorities' refusal to allow family visits to such a gravely ill prisoner may amount to inhuman treatment, and is contrary to Rule 37 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners which Syria is required to comply with as a member of the United Nations. Rule 37 states, "Prisoners shall be allowed under necessary supervision to communicate with their family and reputable friends at regular intervals, both by correspondence and by receiving visits".

'Abd al-Majid Zaghmout's family last saw him two months ago, when he was being held at Sednaya Prison. Only one family member was allowed to visit him, once a month.

'Abd al-Majid Zaghmout was recently transferred to Teshrin Military Hospital where he underwent an operation at the end of June for cancer of the lymph glands. Since the surgery he has been unable to eat, and is being fed via a tube through his nose.

'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a former member of Fatah (a mainstream faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO]), has been held now for 33 years and may be the longest serving arbitrarily detained political prisoner in the Middle East. He was arrested in 1966 and charged with the murder of Palestinian guerrilla leader Yusuf 'Urabi. He denies the charges and alleges he was tortured for 46 days after his arrest to force him to admit to the crime. In 1966 he was sentenced to death by a military court after an unfair trial. The sentence, however, was never carried out and he remains in prison despite a ruling in 1989 by the Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas, that he should be released unless charged with another criminal offence.

'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout is one of hundreds of Syrian political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, who have been detained for years in Syrian jails, many without charge or trial, and others after grossly unfair trials.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic, French or in your own language:**

**To the Syrian Government:**

- expressing grave concern about the deteriorating health of 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout and urging the Syrian government to give him access to any specialist medical care he needs in addition to allowing him immediate and unrestricted access to his family;
- urging the authorities to immediately release him as he has been in detention for 33 years after an unfair trial and as his release was ordered nine years ago by Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas;
- urging the authorities to review his case and to investigate the reason for his continued detention.

**To the Palestinian authority:**

- expressing grave concern at the deteriorating health of 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout;
- urging them to intervene with the Syrian authorities to secure the release of Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout.

**APPEALS TO:**

**To Syria:**

His Excellency, President Hafez al-Assad  
Presidential Palace, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**

**Telexes: 419160 prespl sy**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency, Dr Muhammad Harba  
Minster of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Merjeh Circle, Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**

**Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428**

**Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency Lt. Gen. Mustafa Talas  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence  
Ministry of Defence, Omayyad Square  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegrams: General Mustafa Talas, Damascus, Syria**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency, Nasser Qaddur  
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Al-Rashid Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegrams: Nasser Qaddur, Damascus, Syria**

**Faxes: + 963 11 331 0134**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**To the Palestinian Authority:**

President Yasser Arafat  
Palestinian Authority  
Al-Muntada, Gaza  
Palestinian Authority

**Telegrams: President Arafat, Gaza, Palestinian Authority**

**Faxes: + 972 7 282 2365 (please request a fax tone)**

**Salutation: Dear President**

and 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 3 August 1999.