

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals  
From: Medical Office / Middle East Program  
Date: 10 September 1999

***Further Information on  
MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***

**(See AI Index: MDE 24/20/98, 20 October 1998)  
'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout  
SYRIA**

Theme: long-term detention / ill-health

**Summary**

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that the health of 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian national who has now been detained in Syria for 33 years following an unfair trial, has continued to seriously deteriorate since the organization issued a medical action on his case in October 1998. 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has been diagnosed with cancer [nasopharyngeal carcinoma] and has also been reported to be suffering from heart problems, internal bleeding and degeneration of the cervical spine.

Since the original medical action was issued, 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has been transferred to Teshrin Military Hospital where he underwent an operation for his cancer at the end of June 1999. Reportedly he is unable to eat and is being fed via a nose tube. According to his family, who has been able to visit him once, doctors in the hospital have made clear that 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout's illness is very advanced. Reportedly the doctors have also written to the Syrian authorities to urge 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout's release.

Amnesty International believes that 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout is gravely ill, with a poor prognosis, and is urging the Syrian authorities to immediately release him into the care of his family.

**Background**

'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a former member of Fatah [a mainstream faction in the Palestinian Liberation Organization] now aged 54, has been in detention in Syria since 1966 after having been convicted of the murder of Palestinian guerrilla leader Usuf 'Urabi in a trial which failed to meet the most basic standards for fairness. 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout denies the murder and says he was tortured after his arrest to force him to admit to the crime. In 1989, the Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas, ruled that he should be released unless charged with another criminal offence. This ruling was ignored. 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has been on hunger strike several times to protest against his continued detention.

**Recommended Actions**

Appeals are urgently requested from health professionals to the addresses below:

- referring to your earlier letter [if appropriate], and expressing serious concern at reports that 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout's health reportedly has deteriorated drastically over the last few months
- urging the Syrian authorities to review his case and to immediately release 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout into the care of his family
- recalling the fact that the Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas, ruled in 1989 that 'Abd al Majid Nimer Zaghmout should be released from detention
- asking for detailed information on what medical care 'Abd al Majid Nimer Zaghmout is currently receiving
- urging the authorities to allow 'Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout unrestricted access to his family while he remains in detention.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within a month of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 30 November 1999, and copy any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

#### **ADDRESSES**

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

His Excellency, Nasser Qaddur  
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
Fax: +963 11 331 0134

His Excellency  
Dr Muhammad Harba  
Minster of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

#### **COPIES**

President Yasser Arafat  
Palestinian Authority  
Al-Muntada  
Gaza  
Palestinian Authority  
Fax: + 972.7.282.2365 [ask to send a fax]

Letters to President Arafat should take the form of a copy of your letter to the Syrian authorities with an explanatory cover note.

Please also send copies of your correspondence to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.