

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / Middle East Program
Date: 20 October 1998

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout
SYRIA**

Theme: long-term detention / ill-health

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian national who has now been detained in Syria for 32 years after an unfair trial in 1966, is suffering serious health problems. He is reportedly suffering from heart problems and high blood pressure, internal bleeding, a serious ear infection and degeneration of the cervical spine. Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout was admitted to Al-Muwasah hospital last week after falling into a coma.

In 1989 the Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas, ruled that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout should be released unless charged with another criminal offence. This ruling was ignored and Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout may now be one of the longest serving political prisoners in the region. He has been on hunger strike in prison in protest at his continued detention during the last three weeks.

Amnesty International is urging the Syrian authorities to immediately release Abd al-Majid Zaghmout, and to allow him access to whatever medical care he requires including specialist treatment.

Recommended Actions

Appeals are requested from health professionals to the addresses below:

- stating that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has been sentenced after an unfair trial in 1966 and has remained in detention after 1989 despite a ruling of the Minister of Defence ordering his release
- urging the Syrian authorities to immediately release Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout
- expressing concern at reports that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout's health has drastically deteriorated in recent weeks
- welcoming the fact that he has been transferred from prison to a hospital, and asking for detailed information on his current state of health
- urging the Syrian authorities to give Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout access to any specialist care he requires

ADDRESSES

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

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

His Excellency
Lt General Mustafa Talas
Minister of Defence, Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

COPIES TO:

His Excellency
Nasser Qaddur
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963.11.224.5747

Union des médecins arabes
PO Box 290
Mahrajene, 1082 Tunis
Tunisia
Tel: +216 (1) 886.800
Fax: +216 (1) 889.293

His Excellency
Dr Iyad al-Shatti
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months 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 27 November, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

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SYRIA**

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a Palestinian national aged 54, is suffering serious health problems including heart problems, high blood pressure, internal bleeding caused by an ulcer, dislocation of the cervical spine, and a serious ear infection apparently caused by unhygienic prison conditions. The specialist care Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout might require is reportedly not available in the hospital to which he was transferred last week after having fallen into a coma.

Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, a former member of Fatah, a mainstream faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO], was arrested at the Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria on 10 May 1966 and charged with the politically motivated murder of Palestinian guerilla leader Yusuf 'Urabi. He has always maintained his innocence. Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout was sentenced to death by an exceptional Military Court in 1966 after a grossly unfair trial, but the sentence was never carried out .

Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has remained in detention even after a ruling in 1989 of the Minister of Defence, General Mustafa Talas, that he should be released unless charged with another criminal offence. General Talas continues to be the Minister of Defence in Syria. Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout has been on hunger strike in 'Adra civil prison during the last three weeks in protest at his continued imprisonment.

Background information

Hundreds of Syrian and non-Syrian political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, have been detained for years in Syrian jails, many without charge or trial, and others following grossly unfair trials.

Prison conditions in Syria are poor and access to health care is believed to be extremely limited. Dozens of deaths in custody have been reported in recent years.

Abd al-Majid Nimer Zaghmout, who has now been detained for 32 years, may be the longest serving political prisoner in the Middle East.
