

URGENT ACTION

PROSECUTOR DENIES HOLDING SYRIAN LAWYER

There are increased concerns for the well-being of prominent Syrian human rights lawyer Khalil Ma'touq after the state denied holding him, despite the fact that he has been seen in detention by other detainees.

Last week the public prosecutor replied to a request from a group of lawyers sent two months ago, denying that **Khalil Ma'touq** is being detained. However, released detainees from the State Security branch 285 in Kafr Soussa in Damascus, the capital of Syria, reported seeing Khalil Ma'touq held there within the last month. As such, Khalil Ma'touq appears to be a victim of enforced disappearance. As his whereabouts and fate continue to be concealed, he is outside the protection of the law and at heightened risk of grave human rights violations. There continues to be no further information on the fate or whereabouts of Khalil Ma'touq's friend **Mohammed Thatha**, who is also believed to have been arrested by state agents on 2 October 2012.

Please write immediately in English, Arabic or French or your own language:

- Expressing deep concern that the public prosecutor has denied that Khalil Ma'touq is being held by the state, despite reports that he was seen in detention as recently as a few weeks ago, and that there is no news about the fate of Mohammed Thatha who disappeared at the same time as Khalil Ma'touq;
- Calling on the Syrian authorities to urgently inform Khalil Ma'touq and Mohammed Thatha's families of the two men's fate and whereabouts. If they are held solely on account of Khalil Ma'touq's human rights work or for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly, they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- If both men are detained, urging the authorities to ensure that both men are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and allowed immediate contact with their families and lawyers of their choice and that Khalil Ma'touq in particular, who has advanced lung disease, is granted access to all necessary medical care.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 APRIL 2013 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad

Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)

(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method;

please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Major General Mohamad Ibrahim al-Shaar

Fax: +963 11 311 0554

(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method;

please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim

Fax: +963 11 214 6253 (keep trying)

(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method;

please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellence

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 298/12. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/081/2012/en>

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INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Thousands of suspected opponents of the government have been arrested in Syria since pro-reform protests broke out in February 2011 and many, if not most, are believed to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated. Amnesty International has the names of well over 720 people reported to have died in custody during this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment. See *'I wanted to die': Syria's torture survivors speak out* (MDE 24/016/2012)

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>.

Since protests first broke out, the situation has evolved into an internal armed conflict throughout much of the country. Systematic and widespread human rights abuses, including crimes against humanity and possible war crimes have become rife, with civilians being the main victims. Amnesty International has documented numerous examples, most recently in documents such as *Syria: Indiscriminate attacks terrorize and displace civilians* (MDE 24/078/2012)

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/078/2012/en>. Other bodies such as the UN independent international Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic have made similar findings.

Although the vast majority of the human rights abuses documented by Amnesty International have been committed by the state's armed forces and pro-government *shabiha* militias, abuses have also been committed by armed opposition groups. This includes the torture and killing of captured soldiers and *shabiha* militia members as well as the abduction and killing of people known or suspected to support or work with the government and its forces, or the taking of civilians as hostages to try to negotiate prisoner swaps. Amnesty International condemns without reservation such abuses and has called on the leadership of all armed opposition groups in Syria to state publicly that such acts are prohibited and to do all in their power to ensure that armed opposition groups put an immediate stop to them.

In light of this, Amnesty International is continuing to call for the situation in Syria to be referred to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The organization is also calling for an international arms embargo aimed at halting the flow of weapons to the Syrian government, and an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates. Additionally, states considering supplying weapons to the armed opposition should have in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure the material supplied is not used to commit human rights abuses and/or war crimes. The Syrian government should also allow the members of the UN international independent Commission of Inquiry, and international human rights and humanitarian organizations, unfettered access to the country.

Go to the interactive Eyes on Syria map (www.eyesonsyria.org) to see where human rights violations are being committed in Syria, and Amnesty International's global activism towards seeking justice.

Name: Khalil Ma'touq, Mohammed Thatha

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 298/12 Index: MDE 24/006/2013 Issue Date: 20 February 2013