

URGENT ACTION

CHILD HELD INCOMMUNICADO IN SYRIA

Sixteen-year-old Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad, who suffers from asthma, has been held incommunicado in conditions possibly amounting to enforced disappearance since 20 November 2012. He is reported to have been ill-treated and denied medical treatment.

Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad was arrested on 20 November 2012 when the authorities raided the al-Midan neighbourhood of the Syrian capital, Damascus. It is unknown where he was taken after being arrested. His family say they have not received any information from the authorities regarding his arrest and current detention and are too afraid to ask for information about his whereabouts. They did, however, receive a written note from Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad, about 40 days after his arrest, which was smuggled out by detainees released from the Palestine branch, a Military Intelligence-run detention centre notorious for torture. In the note Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad said that he was being held at the Palestine branch and that his health was deteriorating due to lack of medication for his asthma and the prison's cramped and humid conditions.

The reasons for Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad's arrest are unclear. Syrian government forces have arrested thousands of people, including children, since widespread unrest broke out in March 2011 and which has since developed into an internal armed conflict in much of the country. Many, if not most, detainees have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in prisons and detention centres across the country run by Syria's feared security agencies. Over 1,000 people are reported to have died in custody since then.

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

- Urging the Syrian authorities to reveal Ahmed Ismael al-Akkad's whereabouts and fate, grant him immediate access to his family and lawyer, ensure that he is protected from torture or other ill-treatment, and give him all necessary medical care, including any medication he needs to control his asthma;
- Asking for clarification of Ahmed Ismael al-Akkad's legal status; if he is held solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and assembly, he should be released immediately and unconditionally.
- Urging the authorities to ensure that he is treated in accordance with human rights standards outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and within the rules of criminal justice, which include the principle that detention must be a measure of last resort and children in detention should be held separately from adults in facilities that meet the particular needs of children in custody.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 7 JUNE 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 Defence

Brigadier General Fahd Jassem al-Frej

Fax: +963 11 223 7842 (keep trying)

+963 11 666 2460 (keep trying)

(fax/phone line – say "Fax")

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

al-Rashid Street

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: +963 11 214 6253 (keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Where appropriate, please also send copies to the Syrian and Russian diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please also send copies to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations:

His Excellency Bashar Ja'afari, Ph.D., Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, 820 Second Avenue, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10017,

Fax: +1212 983 4439; E-mail: exesec.syria@gmail.com Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad is a resident of the predominantly Sunni neighbourhood of al-Midan in the capital, Damascus. According to a Syrian human rights organization, heavy clashes took place between Syrian government forces and armed opposition groups in the neighbourhoods of al-Tadamon and al-Hajar al-Aswad, which are close to al-Midan, in the days that preceded Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad's arrest. Al-Hajar al-Aswad was also shelled by government forces on 19 November 2012, .

Under international law, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child to which Syria is a state party, anyone under the age of 18 is a child. State parties shall ensure that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. Furthermore, children suspected of a criminal offence should be treated according to the rules of juvenile justice. Principles of juvenile justice include: detention or imprisonment only as a measure of last resort – under regular review and for the shortest appropriate time and a commitment to the use of alternatives to detention whenever possible; prohibition of solitary confinement; separation of children in detention facilities from adult detainees; no life imprisonment without the possibility of release in connection with offences committed while under 18; and attention to the particular needs of children in custody and an emphasis on reformation and social rehabilitation of child prisoners.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in mid-March 2011, government forces have indiscriminately killed or targeted civilians during air or artillery strikes, carried out extrajudicial executions and arrested thousands of individuals, many of whom have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment. The eight general amnesties issued so far have left thousands held. The most recent on 16 April 2013 focused on all those imprisoned for offences committed before that date. Up to 7,000 inmates were expected to benefit from this measure. Yet, similarly to previous general amnesties, the most recent one excludes thousands of individuals detained incommunicado and without charge, often in conditions that amount to enforced disappearance. Some are prisoners of conscience. Many have been held without charge for months; others may be facing charges under the 2012 Anti-Terrorism Law or the Penal Code. They include cases of activists, lawyers and aid workers, some of whom were children when arrested. For an insight into the widespread torture and other ill-treatment in Syria's detention centres, please see *I wanted to die: Syria's torture survivors speak out*, March 2012 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>).

Amnesty International has received the names of over 1,000 individuals believed to have died in the custody of the Syrian security forces since the beginning of the unrest. Amnesty International documented this practice in August 2011: *Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/035/2011/en>).

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 members of the security forces 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 opposition forces put an immediate stop to them. See *Syria: Summary killings and other abuses by armed opposition groups* (MDE 24/008/2013), 14 March 2013. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/008/2013/en/8d527c4e-2aff-4311-bad8-d63dbc97c96a/mde240082013en.html>.

Name: Ahmed Ismael al-'Akkad

Gender m/f: Male

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