

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Health Concern

12 September 1990

SYRIA: Muhammad 'Id Ashawi

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that Muhammad 'Id Ashawi is in very poor health and in need of urgent medical attention. He is reported to be suffering from a number of complaints including acute anaemia, rheumatism and a stomach ulcer, and has been denied medical treatment in prison or transfer to hospital. He is reported to have lost consciousness recently on several occasions. His relatives are trying to send him medicines from abroad.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Muhammad 'Id Ashawi is one of a group of people arrested in 1970 and 1971 following the coup of November 1970 which brought Hafez al-Assad to power. All those arrested served in or were connected with the 1966-70 government of the Syrian Ba'th Party. Eighteen remain in detention. None has been charged or tried. All were reportedly detained for their refusal to cooperate with the present government. All have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International. Some were allegedly tortured after their arrest, and all are said to be in poor health due to inadequate medical facilities and prolonged detention in harsh prison conditions. Medicines are provided by visiting relatives rather than the prison authorities.

Muhammad 'Id Ashawi, born in 1930 in Deir al-Zor, is a former Minister of Foreign Affairs. He graduated in law from Damascus University and practised as a lawyer. He also served as governor of the provinces of Dar'a and Hama from 1963 to 1965. He was elected a member of the Regional Command Council of the Ba'th Party in 1965, and was also appointed Minister of Interior in September of that year. In November 1968 he was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was arrested in December 1970. He is married, and has children.

Muhammad 'Id Ashawi is detained in al-Mezze Military Prison in Damascus, along with 17 other members or supporters of the former government. The group includes a former president, five former cabinet ministers and a former ambassador. In recent years the group have been kept apart from other political prisoners and are sharing two adjoining cells. They are allowed monthly visits from their families, reportedly on the orders of the President. They have access to a prison library, but no books or newspapers may be brought in from outside. No correspondence to or from the prisoner is allowed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:

- expressing concern at reports that Muhammad 'Id Ashawi is in very poor health and in urgent need of medical attention, which he is being denied;
- requesting details of the current state of health of Muhammad 'Id Ashawi and urging that he be given immediate access to all necessary medical care, including transfer to a hospital if necessary, in accordance with internationally recognized standards for the treatment of prisoners;

- expressing concern that Muhammad 'Id Ashawi has been detained without charge or trial since 1970, and urge that he be immediately and unconditionally released as a prisoner of conscience;

- stressing the responsibilities of the government to provide adequate medical care for all prisoners, including regular access to a qualified doctor, treatment in prison, and prompt removal to a hospital where necessary ;

- referring to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and Article 6 of the United Nations Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, which states:

"Law enforcement officers shall ensure the full protection of the health of prisoners in their custody and, in particular, take immediate action to secure medical attention whenever requested."

PLEASE ARRANGE FOR SOME APPEALS FROM MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS.

APPEALS TO:

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

Telegrams: President al-Assad,
Damascus, Syria

Telexes: PRESPL 419160 SY

His Excellency Khaled al-Ansari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Justice Minister,
Damascus, Syria

His Excellency Mahmud al-Zu'bi
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Prime Minister al-Zu'bi
Damascus, Syria

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

Telegrams: Health Minister,
Damascus, Syria
Telexes: HEALTH 412655 SY

His Excellency Muhammad Harba
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior

Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: Interior Minister,
Damascus, Syria

COPIES TO: Dr. M. Sherif Bakle
Ordre des Medecins Syriens
Place de l'Etoile
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic (Doctors' Association)

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 October 1990.