

URGENT ACTION

DOCTORS HELD INCOMMUNICADO IN SYRIA

Syrian doctor Mohamad Osama Abdulsalam Al-Baroudi has been held incommunicado since he was arrested from his Damascus clinic on 18 February. He is believed to have been tortured and there are grave fears for his health. Fellow doctor Mahmoud Al Refaai, arrested on 16 February, also continues to be held incommunicado.

Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi, a specialist in gastroenterology, was arrested on 18 February 2012 by members of the Syrian Criminal Security, according to his colleagues at the hospital, who informed his family about his arrest. According to a family member abroad, his co-workers were apparently told that he was being taken to the Criminal Security branch near the clinic. However, when the family asked at the branch, officers denied that he was being held there.

He is then believed to have been moved to the Air Force Intelligence branch in al-Mezzeh, Damascus. A recently released doctor has said he was detained there with Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi in late February, along with Syrian cardiologist **Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai**, who was arrested on 16 February. The released doctor claims he witnessed both men being repeatedly subjected to torture, including beatings. Reportedly, Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi was taken to hospital after complaining about chest pain. His family is very concerned for his health as he suffers from diabetes and hypertension and requires regular medication. Following intestinal bypass surgery, he also requires a special diet and supplements. It is unclear whether he has access to this or his regular medication.

While the Syrian authorities have not released any information on the reasons for the two men's arrest as far as Amnesty International is aware, the recently released doctor told Amnesty International that his own arrest and subsequent torture appeared to be related to the medical treatment he gave injured demonstrators. He believes that Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi as well as Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai may be detained for the same reasons.

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

- Expressing concern that Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi and Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai have been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance since 18 February and 16 February 2012 respectively, and urging the authorities to ensure that they are provided with all necessary medical care, protected from torture and other ill-treatment and given immediate access to their families and lawyers;
- Calling for Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi and Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai to be released immediately and unconditionally if they are held as prisoners of conscience solely for providing medical treatment to injured people.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JUNE 2012 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street
 Damascus,
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
 Ibrahim al-Shaar, Ministry of Interior,
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 211 9578 (keep trying)

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 Excellence

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country, as below:

Name Address Fax Fax number Email Email address

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 114/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/037/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The released doctor told Amnesty International that he also witnessed both Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai and Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi being held in painful stress positions, including the *shabeh* position (being suspended by manacled wrists or ankles from a hook). Apparently they were also forced to stand in the courtyard naked for prolonged periods, with cold water being thrown at them at regular intervals. Amnesty International was also told that most of the detention rooms were only two by 1.7 metres but contained 10 to 15 people.

Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi was born in Hama, a city and governorate that has seen particularly strong opposition to the government since the start of the unrest in early 2011. Another released detainee believes that Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi may have been singled out in detention because of this as he heard him being repeatedly insulted in relation to his birth place.

Largely peaceful pro-reform demonstrations began sporadically in February 2011 but became larger and more frequent after the first killings of demonstrators the following month. Initially largely peaceful, the Syrian authorities responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. In the year since then, although peaceful demonstrations have continued, the unrest has turned increasingly violent, with armed opposition groups, many loosely under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) carrying out attacks mainly against Syrian security forces. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 9,000 people reported to have died or been killed during or in connection with the protests and related unrest since mid-March 2011. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting soldiers who have taken up arms against the government.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested in the past 12 months and many, if not most, are believed to have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has the names of more than 350 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see "*I wanted to die*": *Syria's torture survivors speak out* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>. Amnesty International has also received many reports of individuals apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide families with any information concerning the fate of individuals, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by security forces.

Despite the Syrian government's acceptance on 27 March 2012 of the six-point plan drawn up by the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League on Syria, Kofi Annan, and the ceasefire agreement of 12 April, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance. Amnesty International has previously documented human rights violations and abuses against injured people and health professionals in selected Syrian hospitals. For more information, please see Amnesty International's report *Health crisis: Syrian government targets the wounded and health workers* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/059/2011/en>.

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic and widespread human rights violations which amount to crimes against humanity, and has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as an international arms embargo on Syria, and for an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

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 to seek justice.

Name: Dr Mohamad Osama Al-Baroudi and Dr Mahmoud Al Refaai

Gender m/f: Both male

Further information on UA: 114/12 Index: MDE 24/042/2012 Issue Date: 9 May 2012