

URGENT ACTION

MISSING SCHOOLTEACHER BELIEVED HELD

Syrian sports teacher Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh has been missing since 26 February and may have been subjected to an enforced disappearance.

Schoolteacher Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh was last seen driving to meet his cousin on 26 February in the al-Mezzeh neighbourhood of the capital, Damascus. Despite his family's repeated enquiries, the authorities have given them no explanation of where he is or his fate, prompting fears that he may have been subjected to an enforced disappearance.

An unofficial source at the Air Force Intelligence branch in al-Mezzeh has said that he saw Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh inside the branch, and that his health had deteriorated significantly following months of torture and other ill-treatment. These claims have not been officially confirmed by the Syrian authorities.

While the Syrian authorities have not revealed whether Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh's has been arrested, Syrian human rights defenders believe he may have been arrested for peaceful political or human-rights related activities. If he is indeed held for such reasons, Amnesty International would consider Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh a prisoner of conscience and would call for his immediate and unconditional release.

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

- Calling on the Syrian authorities to inform Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh's family of his whereabouts or fate immediately, expressing concern that he has been missing since 26 February 2012 and may have been subjected to an enforced disappearance;
- Expressing concern that Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh may be a prisoner of conscience and if so calling on the Syrian authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and allowed contact with his family, a lawyer of his choice and any medical treatment he may require, without delay.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 JULY 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 Excellency

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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 16 months 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 the Syrian security forces. Abuses by opposition forces have also been reported, including torture or killing of captured members of the security forces, including the pro-government militias known as *shabiha* and perceived supporters of the government, and suspected informers. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 10,500 people reported to have died or been killed in connection with the unrest since mid-March 2011.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested since protests broke out and many, if not most, are believed to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Amnesty International has the names of more than 390 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>. Of those who have died in custody, 18 children as young as 14 years old, were also either tortured before, or mutilated after death, in particularly grotesque ways, apparently intended to strike terror into the families to whom their corpses were returned. For further information, please see *Syria: Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria*, 31 August 2011 (<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/035/2011/en>).

Amnesty International has also received many reports of people apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide their families with any information on the fate of these people, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by the security forces. Thousands of people have been arrested, with many held incommunicado at unknown locations at which torture and other ill-treatment are reported to be rife. 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 and has documented crimes against humanity and war crimes in northern Syria (see *Deadly Reprisals: Deliberate killings and other abuses by Syria's armed forces*, Index MDE 24/041/2012, June 2012, (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE24/041/2012/en/2a11c167-c2b9-4936-8961-6ceb379d6d46/mde240412012en.html>)).

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 aimed at halting the flow of weapons to the Syrian government, and an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates. The organization is also calling on states considering supplying weapons to the armed opposition to have in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure the material supplied is not used to commit human rights abuses and/or war crimes.

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: Obaida Behaa' al-Rakkadh

Gender m/f: m

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