

URGENT ACTION

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE OF SYRIAN ACTIVIST

Syrian activist Mohamed Bachir Arab has been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance since his arrest on 2 November 2011. According to released detainees, he started a hunger strike on 1 July 2012. Fellow activist Ahmed Omar Azoz was released from detention in March 2012; his current legal status is unknown.

Mohamed Bachir Arab, a doctor, and his friend **Ahmed Omar Azoz** went missing from their hometown, Aleppo, northern Syria, on 2 November 2011. Both had been in hiding from the Syrian security forces. A local contact told Amnesty International that they may have been wanted due to their involvement with the organization of peaceful protests in Aleppo. Despite repeated requests from their families, the Syrian authorities never confirmed the arrests or provided any information as to their well-being or whereabouts. Mohamed Bachir Arab is reported to have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated while held.

Another detainee, released in early July, stated that Mohamed Bachir Arab started a hunger strike on 1 July 2012 demanding he be released or that he be brought before a judge. He was apparently transferred to a hospital on 6 July 2012. Amnesty International has not been able to obtain any information about him since and in light of previous reports of his torture or ill-treatment, there is grave concern for his well-being.

Amnesty International is calling for Mohamed Bachir Arab's fate and current whereabouts to be clarified as a matter of urgency. If he has been detained solely in connection with peaceful pro-reform activities, he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

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

- Calling on the Syrian authorities urgently inform Mohamed Bachir Arab's family of his fate and whereabouts. If he is held solely on account of his peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and assembly he should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to ensure that Mohamed Bachir Arab is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with his family and a lawyer of his choice;
- Urging the authorities to grant him all necessary medical care, in civilian hospitals with specialized facilities if required and to ensure that he is treated humanely at all times and not punished in any way for his hunger strike;

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 AUGUST 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 Defence

His Excellency 'Imad al-Fraj
 Ministry of Defence, Omayyad Square
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 666 2460 (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 check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 333/11 Further information:
<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/074/2011/en>

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to released detainees, the men were held at the Air Force Intelligence branch in Aleppo from the time of their arrest until March 2012, when Ahmed Omar Azoz was released. Mohamed Bachir Arab was then transferred to an Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus. A fellow detainee told a local contact that Mohamed Bachir Arab was taken to a hospital in May 2012 after he sustained head injuries, reportedly as a result of being tortured or otherwise ill-treated. He later returned to the same detention facility with stitches on his face.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested since protests broke out in February 2012 and many, if not most, are believed to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Amnesty International has the names of more than 430 people reported to have died in custody during 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 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. Some – like Ahmed Omar Azoz – have been released after months of secret, incommunicado detention. The human rights situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate 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 which has not been respected, leading to the suspension of the UNSMIS observer mission on 16 June 2012. Since 27 March, 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, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/041/2012/en>). Hostilities between government forces and the armed opposition has reached the level of an internal armed conflict throughout the country.

Although the vast majority of the human rights abuses documented by Amnesty International were committed by the state's security and armed forces, including *shabiha* militias, abuses have also been committed by armed opposition groups, including the torture and killing of captured soldiers and *shabiha* as well as the kidnapping and killing of people known or suspected to support or work with the government and its forces and militias. Amnesty International condemns without reservation such abuses and calls on the leadership of all armed opposition groups in Syria to publicly state that such acts are prohibited and to do all within their power to ensure that opposition forces put an immediate end to such abuses.

Amnesty International has documented systematic, as well as widespread, human rights abuses, crimes against humanity and possible war crimes by Syrian security forces. The organization 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.

Name: Mohamed Bachir Arab and Ahmed Omar Azoz

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 333/11 Index: MDE 24/066/2012 Issue Date: 19 July 2012