

URGENT ACTION

NEW FEARS FOR ACTIVISTS AS TRIAL APPROACHES

Three Kurdish political activists remain incommunicado after more than one year in detention. The third session of their trial, postponed from 19 October when the men were inexplicably not brought to the hearing, is due to be on 6 February. They remain at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Hassan Saleh, Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed and Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa are all senior members of the Kurdish Yekiti Party in Syria, which has not been legally authorized by the Syrian authorities. According to their lawyers, they are currently held at the political wing in 'Adra prison near Damascus, the capital. They have been held incommunicado for more than 13 months, following their arrest on 26 December 2009.

The three men are being tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), an exceptional court whose proceedings fall far short of international fair trial standards. They are charged with "aiming at separating part of the Syrian lands" and "joining an international political or social organization", apparently for calling for the Kurdish areas of Syria to be granted autonomy during their party's conference on 3 December 2009. On the basis of this new information, Amnesty International has concluded that the men are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association.

The men's trial before the SSSC began on 6 June. A second session was held on 20 July, following which their lawyers reported that the men appeared exhausted and frail in court. Their failure to be brought to the hearing on 19 October heightens concerns for their well-being. All three men suffer from various ailments: Hassan Saleh and Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa both require regular medication for thyroid and other problems and Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed suffers from a slipped disc in his back. It is not known if they have access to medication.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to release Hassan Saleh, Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed and Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association;
- Expressing concern that the three men were not brought to their hearing on 19 October, and continue to be held incommunicado, as they have been since their arrest on 26 December 2009;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that the three men are protected from torture or other ill-treatment, allowed visits from their families and given access to lawyers of their choice and any medical attention they may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 MARCH 2011 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410
 Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Major Sa'id Mohamed Samour
 Ministry of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 2119729
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 214 6251
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 26/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/028/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Hassan Saleh, Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed and Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa, along with Anwer Naso, also a member of the Yekiti Party, were arrested on 26 December 2009 by members of Political Security, one of Syria's security agencies. Initially, the four men were held in solitary confinement for nine days by Political Security officials in al-Hasakah, north-east Syria, and interrogated, then transferred to Political Security's al-Fayha' branch in Damascus on 4 January 2010. Anwer Naso, who was reportedly assaulted and beaten on the soles of his feet while in detention, was released without charge on 22 April. However, the other three men continued to be held incommunicado and were transferred to the wing for political prisoners in 'Adra prison (formally known as Damascus Central Prison) on an unknown date.

Kurds, who comprise up to 10 per cent of the population and live mostly in the north-east, experience identity-based discrimination, including restrictions on use of their language and culture. Tens of thousands of Syrian Kurds are effectively stateless, further restricting their access to social and economic rights.

Defendants appearing before the SSSC suffer systematic violations of their basic defence rights. They do not have the right of appeal and have restricted access to their lawyers. The court also accepts as evidence "confessions" allegedly extracted under torture and defendants' claims that they have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated are almost never investigated. Amnesty International has recommended that the SSSC be subjected to a review which would lead to it being fundamentally reformed or abolished.

Torture and other ill-treatment are widespread in Syria's detention and interrogation centres, police stations and prisons. Since the beginning of 2010, seven people are reported to have died as a possible result of abuses in custody. The authorities have taken no action to investigate these allegations, as far as Amnesty International is aware.

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