

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN BROTHERS HELD BY INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Syrian brothers 'Abd al-Rahman Hammada and Wa'el Hammada, who have been detained since 30 April and 12 May respectively, are now believed to be held incommunicado at one of the three Air Force Security branches in the capital Damascus. Reports suggest that they have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Wa'el Hammada's wife, Razan Zaitouneh, a prominent human rights activist who has been in hiding since April, told Amnesty International today that she learned through reliable sources that her husband and his brother 'Abd al-Rahman Hammada are both held in Damascus by the Air Force Security, an intelligence agency.

"Air Force Security has three branches in Damascus; I do not know in which one Wa'el and 'Abd al-Rahman are being held," she said. "Some told me that both of them are being badly tortured, while others did not have information about 'Abd al-Rahman but said that they knew that Wa'el was tortured in the first few days of his detention and that he was interrogated three times. I've been pressing for information about their wellbeing for some time, but only recently managed to get anywhere as people avoided telling me things so as not to upset me."

'Abd al-Rahman Hammada and Wa'el Hammada were arrested on 30 April and 12 May respectively. To date, the Syrian authorities have not revealed why they are holding them. Amnesty International believes, however, that Abd al-Rahman Hammada was arrested to pressure Wa'el Hammada to hand himself over and that Wa'el Hammada is partly held because of his peaceful involvement in the popular protests calling for political reform. In addition, Razan Zaitouneh told Amnesty International that she heard that during his interrogation Wa'el Hammada was asked extensively about her human rights activities in relation to the current unrest.

Amnesty International believes that both men are prisoners of conscience, with Wa'el Hammada detained for legitimately exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association and his marriage to Razan Zaitouneh, and 'Abd al-Rahman Hammada apparently detained solely on account of his family relationship with Wa'el Hammada.

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

- Expressing concern at reports that 'Abd al-Rahman Hammada and Wa'el Hammada have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated and calling on the authorities to immediately ensure that both men are protected from further such treatment and that they have immediate access to legal counsel of their own choosing, and any medical attention they may require;
- Urging the authorities to investigate the allegations of torture and to ensure that anyone found responsible is brought to justice;
- Calling on them to immediately and unconditionally release Wa'el Hammada and 'Abd al-Rahman Hammada as Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 22 JULY 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 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 1st update of UA 149/11 (MDE 24/020/2011). Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/020/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since popular protests calling for political reform in Syria began to be violently repressed in mid-March, more than 1,000 people, including children, are believed to have been killed. Many of them appear to have been killed as a result of the security forces using live ammunition on peaceful protests or during military operations by the Syrian army in a number of Syrian cities. Thousands of others have been arrested by the Syrian army and security forces, of whom hundreds remain detained incommunicado, despite a "general amnesty" that was issued on 31 May. Please see <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/syria-must-release-all-prisoners-conscience-under-amnesty-2011-06-02>

The arrests have targeted people perceived to have organized or openly supported the protests, whether orally in public gatherings, in the media, on the internet or elsewhere. They include political and human rights activists, mosque imams and journalists. These mass arrests have forced a number of political and human rights activists to go into hiding. Amnesty International believes that many of those detained are likely to be prisoners of conscience, held merely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association by peacefully supporting or taking part in protests. Amnesty International has documented accounts of torture and other ill-treatment reported by some recently released detainees.

The Air Force Security is one of the four main intelligence agencies in Syria. They have a history of arbitrarily arresting and detaining people on suspicion of dissent and are widely reported to practise torture and other ill-treatment with impunity.

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