

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN NEWS REPORTER AT RISK OF TORTURE

'Adel Walid Kharsa, a 25-year-old news reporter from Hama, Syria, has been held incommunicado since his arrest on 17 August from the house in which he was hiding. Amnesty International believes he is at risk of torture and ill-treatment.

'Adel Walid Kharsa began working as a freelance news reporter during the uprising that began almost six months ago in order to cover the public protests against the government in Hama, one of Syria's largest cities. He was seized by unidentified security forces from the house in southern Hama in which he was sheltering. They asked for him by name before taking him away, according to relatives who spoke to Amnesty International.

His family does not know which of the many different state security forces that operate in Syria arrested him or where he is being detained, though unconfirmed information from unofficial sources suggests that he has been transferred to Damascus, the capital.

'Adel Walid Kharsa went into hiding when the government launched an intensive security crackdown in Hama in early July. He knew he was being sought for arrest by the authorities as he received several calls to his cell phone from security officials telling him to give himself up.

'Adel Walid Kharsa made his news reports anonymously by phone out of fear for his safety. His identity eventually became known to Syrian security officials who, at least once prior to his arrest went to one of his neighbours' homes to ask about him, making clear that they knew that he was engaged in reporting on the government's response to local protests.

Amnesty International is concerned that 'Adel Walid Kharsa's arrest and detention is directly connected with his legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and work as a news reporter covering the popular protests and the government's brutal security crackdown in Hama.

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

- Express concern that 'Adel Walid Kharsa has been held incommunicado since 17 August putting him at grave risk of torture and ill-treatment, and asking for his whereabouts and legal status to be revealed immediately;
- Express concern that 'Adel Walid Kharsa may be held solely for his work as a news reporter and noting that, if this is the case, Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that 'Adel Walid Kharsa is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with his family and lawyer of his choice, and provided with any medical attention he requires.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

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

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
Ibrahim al-Shaar Minister of Interior
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 113110554
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send 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 6251/2/3
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. .

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Syrian security forces have been carrying out widespread arrests in response to mass protests calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down, which began in mid-March. The arrests have targeted people perceived to have organized or openly supported those protests, whether orally in public gatherings, in the media, on the internet or elsewhere. They include journalists, political and human rights activists, and mosque imams. The wave of arrests has forced a number of activists and journalists into hiding.

Amnesty International has gathered sufficient information to indicate that interrogators in detention facilities question detainees under torture on whether or not they have given information about events in Syria to regional and international media outlets.

UA: 252/11 Index: MDE 24/043/2011 Issue Date: 22 August 2011