

# URGENT ACTION

## DEATH IN CUSTODY OF SYRIAN ACTIVIST

**Syrian activist Ghayath Mattar, aged 26, is reported to have been killed in custody following his arrest by Syrian security forces on 6 September. His dead body was returned to his family on 10 September. Four other activists arrested at the same time are in grave danger.**

Syrian security forces returned **Ghayath Mattar's** body to his family on 10 September, four days after his arrest. The official reason given for his death is that he was "shot by armed gangs". However, there was bruising and other signs of ill-treatment on his body. Amnesty International has seen video film of the body showing injuries.

Ghayath Mattar was a prominent activist in Daraya, a suburb of Damascus, who is said to have previously received threats against his life from members of the security forces. He is reported to have been detained on 6 September, apparently by members of Air Force Intelligence, and is believed to have died in the custody of the security forces – bringing the total number of reported deaths in detention since April to more than 90.

His death heightens concern for four other activists from Daraya who were detained at the same time and who are at grave risk. They are **Yahya Shurbaji** and his brother **Ma'an Shurbaji**, **Mohamed Tayseer Khouli** and **Mazen Zyadeh**. All four have been held incommunicado at an unknown location since their arrest.

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

- Express deep concern at the reported death in custody of Ghayath Mattar and call for an immediate independent investigation of the cause and circumstances of his death and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- Express concern about the continuing detention of Yahya Shurbaji, Ma'an Shurbaji, Mazen Zyadeh and Mohamed Tayseer Khouli and urge the Syrian authorities to immediately disclose their whereabouts in detention, allow them immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical care they need, and to protect them against possible torture or other ill-treatment;
- Urge that the four detainees are released immediately and unconditionally if they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression or other human rights.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 OCTOBER 2011 TO:**

<u>President</u>	<u>Minister of Foreign Affairs</u>
Bashar al-Assad	Walid al-Mu'allim
Presidential Palace	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street	al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic	Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410	Fax: +963 11 214 6251
<b>Salutation: Your Excellency</b>	<b>Salutation: Your Excellency</b>

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 268/11:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/050/2011/en>

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the beginning of the popular protests in mid-March, the Syrian security forces have arrested thousands of people and activists across the country. Amnesty International has received numerous accounts of detainees being tortured or otherwise ill-treated as well as reports of at least 88 deaths in custody between April and mid-August 2011, in many cases as an apparent result of such abuses.

According to human rights activists, Air Force Intelligence oversees arrests in Daraya. Along with the other Syrian intelligence services, it regularly detains people suspected of opposing the government and holds them incommunicado for lengthy periods in detention centres that are notorious for torture and other ill-treatment.

Activists from Daraya have told Amnesty International that all of those involved in organizing protests there went into hiding soon after the outbreak of the popular protests in mid-March, and only go out in public to take part in the protests. They include Yahya Shurbaji, who went into hiding in April following repeated raids on his house by security forces. For further information on the arrests of other activists from Daraya, please see *Urgent Action: Protesters at risk of torture after arrest* (Index: MDE 24/041/2011). For Amnesty International's report on deaths in custody, please see *Syria: Deadly Detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria* (Index: MDE 24/035/2011).

Amnesty International was informed that roughly 300 people attended Ghayath Mattan's funeral, despite reported attempts of the security forces to prevent his family from organising a public funeral. During the funeral, contacts reported a heavy presence of security forces both at his home and at the graveyard where he was buried. Four people are said to have been shot by the security forces at the funeral, one fatally. Ghayath was married; his widow is expecting a child.

Name: Yahya Shurbaji, Ma'an Shurbaji, Ghayath Mattar, Mohamed Tayseer Khouli and Mazen Zyadeh

Gender m/f: All male

Further information on UA: 268/11 Index: MDE 24/052/2011 Issue Date: 13 September 2011