

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN REPORTER'S BROTHER HELD

Amnesty International has learnt that 'Imad Walid Kharsa, the brother of detained Syrian reporter 'Adel Walid Kharsa, is also being detained and has been held incommunicado since August. It is gravely concerned that both men are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

According to information received by Amnesty International, 'Imad Walid Kharsa was arrested on 24 August. He was seized from a house he was sheltering in near Hama, central Syria. Witnesses told relatives that 'Imad Walid Kharsa appeared to have been injured during his arrest. The reason why 'Imad Walid Kharsa went into hiding is not known by Amnesty International. His family does not know which security force arrested him or where he is being held. They have received unconfirmed information through unofficial channels that he was transferred at some point to Damascus but have not been able to obtain further details.

'Adel Walid Kharsa, a freelance news reporter covering the protests against the regime, has been arrested twice in recent months. The first time was on 17 August when he was arrested at a house in Hama he was hiding in, following threats. He was released on 23 October following two months of incommunicado detention at the State Security-run detention centre known as Branch 285 in Damascus. He was rearrested on 31 October when he was stopped in a car at a Military Intelligence checkpoint in Hama. His family has had no information about him since his arrest.

Amnesty International is concerned that 'Adel Walid Kharsa may have been detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression by working as a news reporter and covering events during the protests and the security crackdown in Hama. It does not know whether 'Imad Walid Kharsa's detention is connected with that of his brother.

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

- Express concern that brothers 'Adel Walid Kharsa and 'Imad Walid Kharsa have been held incommunicado since 31 October and 24 August respectively and ask for their whereabouts to be revealed;
- 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 would consider him a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that the brothers are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and allowed contact with their family and lawyer of their choice, and provided with any medical attention they may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JANUARY 2012 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

His Excellency Major General
 Mohamad Ibrahim al-Shaar Minister
 of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus

Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 311 0554

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 6251/2/3

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. This is the first update of UA 252/11. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/043/2011/en>

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 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Syrian security forces have been carrying out widespread arrests in response to anti-government protests and the ongoing unrest, 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 information indicating that, in a number of cases, interrogators in detention facilities have questioned detainees under torture about whether they have given details about events in Syria to regional and international media outlets.

Name: 'Adel Walid Kharsa; 'Imad Walid Kharsa

Gender m/f: Both M

Further information on UA: 252/11 Index: MDE 24/078/2011 Issue Date: 22 November 2011