

# URGENT ACTION

## HAYTHAM AL-MALEH'S HEALTH FAILING

**Prisoner of conscience Haytham al-Maleh is very ill, and he has not taken any of the medication he needs since 11 February.**

Since 11 February, the authorities have not allowed detainees in 'Adra prison to obtain medication from anywhere but the prison pharmacy. Haytham al-Maleh will only take medication provided by his family, because he believes the prison pharmacy's medicine is of poor quality.

He was brought before a military judge in Damascus on 22 February to face new charges of "insulting the president" and "slandering a governmental body", in a public hearing. These charges were based on information from a prisoner detained for a non-political offence. Haytham al-Maleh said the information consisted of "lies and acts of provocation" by the prisoner.

Diplomats and two Italian lawyers representing the International Federation for Human Rights, an international non-governmental organization that aims at improving human rights protection, who had come to observe the trial session, were not allowed to attend. Haytham al-Maleh's wife, who was present in court, was not allowed to shake his hand or talk to him. On his way out, security officers dragged him away from her when they embraced.

According to those who did attend the hearing, Haytham al-Maleh was so frail that his voice was weak. He had passed out during the week before the hearing, because he had not received his medication. The day after the hearing, the new charges were dropped under a presidential amnesty for prisoners convicted of minor offences, but the charges brought against him on 3 November still stand.

Conditions in 'Adra prison are poor. Haytham al-Maleh sleeps on a mattress on the floor in an overcrowded cell. He has diabetes and an overactive thyroid gland and has not had any medication since 11 February, although he needs to take regular medication to treat both conditions. His health is deteriorating. Individuals suffering from diabetes and an overactive thyroid gland who do not take medication are at risk of severe weight loss, falling into a coma, and even heart and kidney failure. Unlike other detainees in 'Adra prison, Haytham al-Maleh is usually accompanied by a prison officer when meeting with the prison doctor.

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

■ Urging the authorities to release Haytham al-Maleh immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 APRIL 2010 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 Sa'id Mohamed  
 Samour  
 Ministry of Interior  
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: +963 11 222 3428**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid al-Mu'allim  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
 Abu Rummaneh  
 al-Rashid Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: +963 11 332 7620**

**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: 281/09 (MDE 24/027/2009). Further information: [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/027/2009/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/027/2009/en)

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Haytham al-Maleh was charged by a military judge on 3 November with "conveying false news", "weakening national sentiment" and "slandering a governmental body". These charges relate to his public criticism of human rights violations and corruption by Syrian officials, which included a phone interview in September with a Europe-based satellite channel, Baradda TV.

Prison authorities often encourage prisoners charged with or convicted of non-political offences to inform on political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. On 23 April, Kamal al-Labwani, a prisoner of conscience was given an additional term of three years in prison by the First Criminal Military Court in Damascus for "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which would affect the morale of the country" under article 286 of the Penal Code. This sentence was added to the 12-year term he was already serving on account of his work advocating peaceful reform in the country. This new sentence was based on the testimony of a prisoner in his cell in 'Adra prison that Kamal al-Labwani had returned from one of the hearings of his previous trial and spoken disparagingly of the government. Kamal al-Labwani denied the charge and said prisoners detained for non-political offences were working in conjunction with the prison authorities, who had ignored his complaints that he had been assaulted twice in the prison.

Another prisoner of conscience, Walid al-Bunni, who is serving a 30-month sentence for his involvement in the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, a coalition of unauthorized political parties, human rights organizations and pro-democracy activists from across the political spectrum, was brought before Damascus Criminal Court on a new charge of "conveying false news" on 4 May 2009, based on the testimony of another prisoner. The new charge was finally dropped on 17 June 2009 and Walid al-Bunni was acquitted.

Further information on UA: 281/09 Index: MDE 24/004/2010 Issue Date: 26 February 2010

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