

URGENT ACTION

LEBANESE CLERIC HELD INCOMMUNICADO BY SYRIA

Sheikh Hassan Mchaymech, a 46-year-old Lebanese Shi'a cleric and political analyst, has been held incommunicado in an unknown location since his arrest by the Syrian Political Security on 7 July. He is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

According to the family of **Hassan Mchaymech**, he was arrested on the Syrian side of the Jdeidet Yabous border crossing with Lebanon. He was travelling by car with his wife and her mother to Saudi Arabia to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The family told Amnesty International that on the day of the arrest the Syrian authorities informed the Lebanese Armed Forces that he was in their custody.

The Syrian authorities have not revealed the reasons for the arrest of Hassan Mchaymech, where he is being detained, or any charges brought against him, despite several requests by the Lebanese authorities, which were made in response to his family's tireless lobbying.

According to the family, since Hassan Mchaymech's arrest the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has written to the Syrian authorities on more than one occasion to request clarifications of the reason of the arrest but never received a response.

His family also published three appeals in Lebanese newspapers to Lebanese President Michele Suleiman, Prime Minister Sa'ad al-Hariri and Speaker of the National Assembly Nabih Berri, calling for them to pressure the Syrian authorities to reveal Hassan Mchaymech's fate. No response was received. The family also met with the heads of the offices of the officials mentioned above, who told them that the Syrian authorities did not respond to their demands for information.

Hassan Mchaymech suffers from a slipped disc in his back and a stomach ulcer, for which he requires regular medication. It is not known if he has access to medication.

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

- Expressing concern that Hassan Mchaymech has been detained incommunicado in an unknown location since his arrest on 7 July 2010;
- Urging the authorities to release him unless he is to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence and tried in full conformity with international fair trial standards;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that Hassan Mchaymech is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- Urging the authorities to immediately allow him visits from his family, access to a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 NOVEMBER 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

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 and Emigrants
 Dr Ali Hussein al-Chami
 Rue Sursock, Achrafiye
 Beirut, Lebanon
Fax: +961 1 204 895
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Political Security is one of several branches of the Syrian security forces, all of which regularly detain people on the slightest suspicion of opposition to the government, and are known for torture and other ill-treatment. In 2009, at least seven people have been reported to have died as a result of abuses in custody. The authorities have taken no action to investigate these allegations. "Confessions" extracted under duress are systematically used as evidence in Syrian courts, and the defendants' claims that they have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated are almost never investigated.

Hassan Mchaymech was a member of Hizbullah, an influential Shi'a political and military organization in Lebanon that is supported by Syria and Iran, but left in 1998 following internal disagreements. He then created and edited a monthly online magazine (<http://difaf.org>), in which he wrote articles calling for, among other things, tolerance of differences between the various religious sects in Lebanon and the separation of religion and politics. In August 2009, he co-founded, along with a group of other Lebanese Shi'a religious figures, the Independent Scientists' Forum, a non-governmental organization that calls for the respect of intellectual and religious diversity and considers itself independent of government and political parties.

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