

URGENT ACTION

HAYTHAM AL-MALEH FACING PRISON

Haytham al-Maleh, who is 78, will appear before a court on 25 October. If he is tried and convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison, simply for talking about human rights violations and government corruption in Syria.

Haytham al-Maleh is facing charges of “insulting the president”, “insulting the judiciary”, “conveying within Syria false news that could debilitate the morale of the nation” and “weakening nationalist sentiments”. The charges relate to an interview he gave in September to European-based satellite broadcaster Baradda TV, and also articles and reports he has published over three years about government corruption and human rights abuses in Syria.

He is now in 'Adra Prison, Damascus. In prison it is easier for him to obtain medication for his diabetes and overactive thyroid gland than it was in a State Security detention centre, where detainees are regularly denied any contact with the outside world.

Haytham al-Maleh was arrested on 14 October by State Security and held in secret in a detention centre in the Kafr Sousa area of Damascus. On 19 October he was moved to a branch of the Military Police in Qaboun, a district of Damascus. The next day, he was brought before the Military General Prosecutor, who read out the charges against him. On 25 October, he will be brought before a judge, who will decide whether he should face trial on these charges. If the judge decides he should be tried, and he is convicted, Haytham al-Maleh faces between three and 15 years' imprisonment.

Haytham al-Maleh was imprisoned from 1980 to 1986 for his work for the Freedom and Human Rights Committee of the Syrian Lawyers' Union. The authorities have banned him from travelling abroad since 2004. He is also the former head of the Human Rights Association in Syria, which is banned by the Syrian authorities.

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;
- Urging them to ensure that he is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and that he has access to any medical attention he may require;
- Urging them to allow him regular visits from his family.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 DECEMBER 2009 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 first update of UA 281/09. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/027/2009/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

During his interview with Baradda TV, Haytham al-Maleh spoke of the imprisonment of fellow human rights activists, including the recent case of prisoner of conscience Muhannad al-Hassani, who is detained facing charges relating to his peaceful and legitimate work defending political prisoners; this work has included conducting observations of such prisoners' trials, mainly in front of the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Hearings before the SSSC fall far short of international standards of fair trial. Haytham al-Maleh had been one of Muhannad al-Hassani's defence lawyers.

Haytham al-Maleh also stated in the interview that, although the Syrian authorities "have at their disposal huge resources in the form of the army, intelligence, police and arms and all means of oppression, they hide behind laws which have no logical or legal or just basis" and went on to say that Syrian security forces are able to "commit crimes with impunity". He criticized the "state of emergency" laws, in force since 1964, which are used to curtail freedom of expression and association. He also spoke about government corruption and the increasing gap between the rich and poor in Syria.

Further information on UA: 281/09 Index: MDE 24/028/2009 Issue Date: 22 October 2009

