

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/006/2008

30 January 2008

Further Information on UA 333/07 (MDE 24/045/2007, 17 December 2007) and follow-ups (MDE 24/046/2007, 18 December 2007; MDE 24/002/2008, 7 January 2008; MDE 24/003/2008, 10 January 2008) - Incommunicado detention/ torture and ill-treatment/ prisoners of conscience/medical concern

SYRIA **Dr Feda'a al-Horani (f), aged 51, physician**
 Akram al-Bunni (m), aged 51, former prisoner of conscience, writer and political analyst
 Ahmad To'meh (m), aged 51, dentist
 Jabr al-Shoufi (m), aged 60, Arabic literature teacher
 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged 57, former prisoner of conscience and journalist
 Dr Walid al-Bunni (m), aged 43, former prisoner of conscience and physician (no relation of Akram and Anwar al-Bunni)
 Dr Yasser al-'Eiti (m), aged 39, physician and poet
 Fayez Sarah (m), aged 58, writer and journalist
 Muhammed Haji Darwish (m), aged 48

New name: Marwan al-'Ush (m), aged 52, geology engineer

Marwan al-'Ush, a member of the pro-democracy umbrella group, Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), has become the 10th person to be arrested recently apparently for attending the DDDNC's meeting on 1 December 2007.

Marwan al-'Ush is an independent pro-democracy activist and a former independent candidate for the Syrian parliamentary elections in 2003. He was arrested by State Security officials on 15 January. Since then, pro-democracy activist Riad Seif, who also attended the meeting on 1 December, has also been arrested, meaning 11 DDDNC activists are now in detention (see update to UA 232/07, MDE 24/005/2008, 30 January 2008). Amnesty International considers Marwan al-'Ush and Riad Seif to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association, and is calling for their immediate and unconditional release.

All of the detainees were referred to the Judiciary on 28 January 2008 on charges of "weakening national sentiments" (under Article 285 of the Syrian Penal Code), "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which would affect the morale of the country" (Article 286), joining an "organization formed with the purpose of changing the financial or social status of the state" (Article 306), "inciting sectarian strife" (Article 307), and "joining a secret association" (Article 327).

Walid al-Bunni, Yasser al-'Eiti, Feda' al-Horani, Akram al-Bunni, Ahmad To'meh, Jabr al-Shoufi, 'Ali al-'Abdullah, Fayez Sarah, Marwan al-'Ush were all transferred on 27 January 2008 to 'Adra prison in Damascus. Feda'a al-Horani was transferred on the same day to the women's prison in Douma, on the outskirts of Damascus. Riad Seif was also transferred to 'Adra prison following his appearance before the investigating judge on 29 January 2008.

All these detainees named above are reported to have been ill-treated while in the custody of State Security officials at their base in Damascus; 'Ali al-'Abdullah is alleged to have been so severely beaten that he suffered a serious injury to his oesophagus. It is not known if he has received medical treatment for his injury.

The DDDNC is an unauthorised umbrella group of opposition and pro-democracy groups. The government began to crack down on the grouping on 9 December 2007: 45 DDDNC members have been arrested so far, of whom 34 were released within a few days. None of the 34 is known to have been charged.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- calling on the Syrian authorities to release immediately and drop all charges against the detainees (naming them), since they appear to be based solely on their peaceful exercise of their right to express their beliefs as granted by the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Syria is a state party;
- expressing concern at reports that the detainees were beaten and otherwise ill-treated;
- calling for an independent investigation into these reports, with those responsible to be brought to justice, in accordance with Syria's obligations under the ICCPR and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- calling for guarantees that the detainees will not be tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the Syrian authorities to implement measures laid out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which allow for "the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels".

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General Hassan Ali Turkmani
Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 223 7842
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 666 2460
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 3327620
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 13 March 2008.