

PUBLIC

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UA 231/08 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

SYRIA Mesha'l al-Tammo (m), aged 51, Kurdish political activist

Political activist Mesha'l al-Tammo, who is a member of Syria's Kurdish minority, has not been seen since the early hours of 15 August 2008, when he set off from the northern city of 'Ein al-'Arab (known in Kurdish as Qobani) where he had been undertaking activities on behalf of an unauthorised political party, the Kurdish Future Current in Syria (*Sepela Kurdi –Syria*). He is believed to have been detained by Syrian security police and to be at risk of torture.

According to Syrian human rights organisations and Syrian Kurdish political parties, he is being detained because of his activities as spokesperson of the Kurdish Future Current in Syria. They say that Mesha'l al-Tammo was detained by Syrian security officials somewhere on the road between 'Ein al-'Arab and his home in the city of Aleppo, at one of the checkpoints the authorities set up in response to celebrations held in 'Ein al-'Arab to mark the anniversary of the Turkish branch of the unauthorized Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) taking up arms against the government of Turkey in 1984.

Mesha'l al-Tammo visited 'Ein al-'Arab on 14 August as part of his regular activities in that area for Kurdish Future Current in Syria. He left the city at 2.30am on 15 August, and half an hour later a party contact called him but could not get through. His family got in touch with the various security services, who refused to give them any information.

Anyone who dares to publicly criticise the Syrian authorities risks arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment. Another leading member of the Kurdish minority, the Islamic religious leader Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, was abducted on 10 May 2005. His body, showing signs of torture, was returned to his family in al-Qamishli 20 days later. No investigation into his abduction and murder is known to have been carried out by the Syrian authorities. According to information obtained by Amnesty International, senior state officials were implicated in the crime.

As well as being the spokesperson of the Kurdish Future Current in Syria, Mesha'l al-Tammo is a member of the Committees for the Revival of the Civil Society, an unauthorised pro-reform network of Syrians who meet to discuss human rights and political matters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kurds in Syria suffer severe discrimination because of their ethnicity; many of them are denied Syrian nationality and therefore do not receive the full provision of education, employment, health care and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals. Kurdish human rights defenders and civil society activists, and those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups who may raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria, are particularly at risk of arbitrary arrest and in many cases torture and other ill-treatment. Khalil Hussein, another member of Kurdish Future Current, has been sentenced *in absentia* to 10 years in jail for his involvement in the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, a petition signed by some 300 Syrian and Lebanese nationals calling for the normalization of relations between their two countries.

Torture is widespread in Syrian detention and investigation centres, particularly during pre-trial, incommunicado detention.

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

- urging the authorities to reveal the whereabouts of Mesha'I Temo and expressing great concern that he is detained incommunicado at an unknown location;
- calling on the authorities to release Mesha'I Temo immediately unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that he will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention Against Torture;
- urging the authorities to immediately allow him visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require.

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 29 September 2008.