

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/035/2006

10 May 2006

**Further Information on 73/06 (MDE 24/028/2006, 31 March 2006) Incommunicado detention/Prisoners of Conscience and new concern: Unfair trial**

**SYRIA**

**'Ali al-'Abdullah (m) aged around 55, journalist  
Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m) his son**

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Prisoners of conscience, 'Ali al-'Abdullah and his son Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah have been referred to the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) for trial on 18 June 2006 and are reportedly being held in Sednaya prison, on the outskirts of Damascus. The charges against them are not known. They have been held in incommunicado detention, without access to family members or a lawyer, since their arrest on 23 March 2006. They remain at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Proceedings before the SSSC fall far short of international fair trial standards. Defendants do not have the right of appeal and have restricted access to their lawyers. "Confessions" allegedly extracted under torture are admissible as evidence.

Amnesty International believes 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah are prisoners of conscience held solely for the peaceful expression of their views.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah were arrested after an incident outside the SSSC on 22 March, shortly after an argument between an officer and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah regarding the continuing use of the State of Emergency Laws (SEL) in Syria. 'Ali al-'Abdullah was summoned to appear before the President of the SSSC who threatened to have Muhammad beaten if he attended outside the court again.

The SEL in Syria has been in force for 43 years and has resulted in thousands of suspected political opponents of the government being detained, tortured and held incommunicado without charge or trial, some for over two decades. Others have been convicted and sentenced to lengthy prison terms after grossly unfair trials before the SSSC or the military court. It allows for the establishment of special courts for the trial of state security and political cases without recourse to ordinary court procedures and guarantees.

There has been a recent increase in the number of arrests of Syrian activists, including human rights defenders. Members of Syrian civil society are facing the daily threat of arbitrary and prolonged incommunicado detention with the attached risk of torture and ill-treatment merely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Many of them end up facing prison sentences following seriously unfair trials before the SSSC (see AI statement of 3 April 2006 *Syria: New crackdown on government opponents*, MDE 24/031/2006).

During 2005, 'Ali al-'Abdullah spent over five months and Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah spent three weeks in detention, again for peacefully expressing their opinions (see UA 139/05, MDE 24/032/2005 and follow-ups, and UA 203/05, MDE 24/056/2005 and follow-ups). Another of 'Ali al-'Abdullah's sons, 'Omar, is also a prisoner of conscience being held incommunicado in the same prison (see UA 41/06, MDE 24/029/2006).

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

- calling on the authorities to release 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah immediately and unconditionally as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for their peaceful work in defence of human rights;
- expressing grave concern at reports that they are being held incommunicado, putting them at grave risk of torture;
- urging the authorities to allow 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah immediate access to a lawyer of their own choosing, their family and any medical attention they may require;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against 'Ali and Muhammad al-'Abdullah before the SSSC must comply with international standards for fair trial;
- urging the authorities to allow people to freely exercise the peaceful expression of their views and reminding them that Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens; and that Article 19 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party, affirms the right to enjoy freedoms of opinion and expression (Article 19).

**APPEALS TO:**

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**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 21 June 2006.