

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/093/2005

1 November 2005

Further Information on UA 139/05 (MDE 24/032/2005, 25 May 2005) and follow-ups (MDE 24/038/2005, 3 June 2005, and MDE 24/045/2005, 1 July 2005) - Prisoner of conscience/ incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/unfair trial

**SYRIA
Forum**

'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged 55, journalist and member of Jamal al-Atassi

'Ali al-'Abdullah was brought before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 30 October on charges including "dissemination of false information" under Article 286 of the Penal Code. According to reports, the case, which was apparently attended by diplomatic representatives including from the USA and UK, was adjourned until 11 December.

'Ali al-'Abdullah was arrested on the night of 15 May. A week before his arrest, he had read a statement on behalf of the exiled leader of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) at the now-banned Jamal al-Atassi Forum political discussion group. Among other things, the statement called for political reforms and respect for the rights of individuals in Syria. 'Ali al-'Abdullah has reportedly been held in solitary confinement in 'Adra prison, near the capital, Damascus since his arrest. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concerns about the SSSC, whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trials. Defendants have restricted access to lawyers; "confessions" are admissible as evidence even when they are alleged to have been extracted under torture; allegations of torture are not investigated by the court; judges have wide discretion in sentencing, and convicted prisoners cannot appeal against sentences. In July 2005, the UN Human Rights Committee reiterated its concerns about the conduct of the SSSC and concluded that Syria "should take urgent measures to ensure that all rights and guarantees provided under article 14 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] ... are respected in the composition, functions and procedures of the ... Court and in particular that accused persons [should be] granted the right to appeal against decisions of the Court."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights and civil society organizations are not permitted to operate in Syria and Syrians participating in such organisations have for decades been subjected to human rights violations by the authorities including arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, torture and ill-treatment, unfair trials and restriction of their movement. The past few months have seen an increase in harassment by the authorities of people they view as critics, including a number of human rights defenders. 'Ali al-'Abdullah's son, Muhammad, was tried before the Military Court on 27 September on charges of "establishing and belonging to a secret society" and "defamation of the public administration". The charges were apparently connected to his involvement in the establishment of a support group for families of prisoners of conscience (see UA MDE 24/056/2005 and follow-ups and public statements *Syria: End crackdown on human rights defenders*, MDE 24/034/2005, 25 May 2005 and *Syria: Syrian human rights defenders under attack*, 24/092/2005, 21 October 2005).

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

- calling on the authorities to halt the trial proceedings of 'Ali al-'Abdullah, and to release him immediately, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his opinions;
- expressing concern that the procedures of the SSSC fall far short of international standards for fair trial;
- reminding them that 'Ali al-'Abdullah should be given regular access to his family, a lawyer of his choice and any medical care he may require;

- urging the authorities to release 'Ali al-'Abdullah from solitary confinement and allow him to mix with other detainees.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
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Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
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Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
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His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
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Syrian Arab Republic
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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 13 December 2005.