

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/100/2005

09 November 2005

**Further Information on UA 140/05 (MDE 24/033/2005, 25 May 2005) and follow-up (MDE 24/037/2005, 3 June 2005; MDE 24/043/2005, 20 June 2005; MDE 24/049/2005, 14 July 2005; MDE 24/074/2005, 18 August 2005) - Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/legal concern/medical concern**

**SYRIA**                      **Muhammad Ra'dun (m), aged 56, lawyer, head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights-Syria (AOHR-S)**  
**Nizar Ristnawi (m), founding member of the AOHR-S**

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'Muhammad Ra'dun was released on 3 November. He had been arrested on 22 May 2005 in connection with statements made by the human rights organization he heads, on human rights in Syria.

He was one of the prisoners of conscience, among the 190 political prisoners released under a presidential amnesty to mark the Muslim 'Eid holiday, whose unconditional release Amnesty International had been demanding for years.

Before his release, Muhammad Ra'dun had been scheduled to go on trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 4 December on charges of "disseminating false information" and with "involvement in an illegal organisation of an international nature". He was held in solitary confinement in 'Adra prison, just outside the capital, Damascus, up until his release.

Nizar Ristnawi remains in detention in Sednaya prison on the outskirts of Damascus and not in 'Adra prison as reported in the previous update to this Urgent Action. He continues to receive visits from his wife and is reported to be in good health. He is expected to be tried by the SSSC on 24 November, although it is not known what he is charged with and he is still not allowed access to a lawyer.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns that proceedings before the SSSC fail to meet international standards for fair trial. 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."

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

- welcoming the news of Muhammad Ra'dun's release, but calling on the authorities to release Nizar Ristnawi immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against Nizar Ristnawi before the SSSC must comply with international standards for fair trial, and that he should be given immediate access to a lawyer of his own choosing.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad  
President of the Republic  
Presidential Palace  
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: + 963 11 332 3410**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Acting Minister of Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax + 963 11 222 3428**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus

Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: + 963 11 666 2460**

**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 December 2005.