

PUBLIC

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UA 317/05 Incommunicado detention / Fear of torture/ Possible prisoner of conscience

SYRIA **Nasraldin Ahma (m), aged 34, Syrian Kurdish activist**

Kurdish cultural activist Nasraldin Ahma is reportedly being held incommunicado at the State Security Detention Branch in the Kafr Sousa area of the capital, Damascus. He is at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that he may be a prisoner of conscience, detained as a result of his support for Kurdish culture and traditions.

Nasraldin Ahma was apparently arrested on 17 November at his workplace in the town of Qamishli, north eastern Syria, by about 15 armed members of the Syrian security forces. He was forced into a waiting car and taken away.

On 18 November, two Syrian intelligence service officers reportedly questioned Nasraldin Ahma's seven-year-old son, telling him that they were friends of his father. The officers apparently showed the boy photographs of people and asked him if he could identify the people in the photographs.

Nasraldin Ahma is reportedly a founding member and director of the Qamishli Group for Kurdish Tradition, which supports Kurdish culture and traditions. Restrictions are commonly placed upon the use of the Kurdish language and culture in Syria. The group organises Kurdish cultural events, and its members have also participated in demonstrations calling for the recognition of Kurdish traditions in Syria. Amnesty International has documented cases of severe torture of Syrian Kurdish cultural activists.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kurds in Syria are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention. A large proportion of Syrian Kurds are effectively stateless and, as such, are denied the full provision of education, employment, health and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals, as well as being denied the right to have a nationality and passport. Kurdish human rights defenders who draw attention to this discrimination or undertake other peaceful human rights activities are particularly at risk of arrest and imprisonment. They are often held on specific charges which, to Amnesty International's knowledge, are mostly used against Kurds, such as "involvement in cells seeking to weaken nationalist consciousness and to stir up racial sectarian strife", "aggression aiming to incite civil war and sectarian fighting and incitement to kill", and "attempting to sever part of the Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state". Concerns over discrimination against the Kurds have been expressed by UN bodies, including the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which has strongly recommended that the Syrian authorities: "take effective measures to combat discrimination in practice against minority groups, in particular the Kurds. Such measures [include] allowing for the use of their languages and other expressions of their culture." The use of torture in Syria detention centres and prison is widespread and systematic. In 2004, five of the nine people who are suspected to have died as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody were Syrian Kurds.

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

- expressing concern that Nasraldin Ahma is reportedly being held incommunicado at an unconfirmed location;

- calling for Nasraddin Ahma to be released as he may be a prisoner of conscience detained merely for calling for the recognition of Kurdish rights in Syria;
- calling for Nasraddin Ahma's whereabouts to be disclosed, and for assurances that he is not being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;
- reminding the authorities that as a state party to the Convention Against Torture, Syria is obliged to review all of its legislation and practices in line with the requirements of the Convention, and ensure that all its provisions are fully implemented;
- urging that Nasraddin Ahma be allowed visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require.

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
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His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
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Damascus
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 27 January 2006.