



amnesty
international

**CRUEL.
INHUMAN.
DEGRADES
US ALL.**

**STOP TORTURE
AND ILL-TREATMENT
IN THE 'WAR ON TERROR'**

SYRIA

Amnesty International's campaign to stop torture and ill-treatment in the 'war on terror'

Human rights are under threat. The absolute ban on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment – one of the most universally accepted human rights – is being undermined. In the “war on terror”, governments are not only using torture and ill-treatment, they are seeking to justify it. They argue that interrogation methods which amount to torture or ill-treatment, and detention conditions which constitute ill-treatment, are both justifiable and necessary.

This is a crisis in the struggle to eliminate torture and ill-treatment, and we are therefore redoubling our efforts. We are urging the widest possible network of people to join us in reasserting the absolute ban on torture and ill-treatment, including methods currently being described as “coercive interrogation”. No euphemisms can justify the unjustifiable. We want to stop the torture and ill-treatment that is being inflicted in the “war on terror”. We also want the prohibition on such brutal treatment to emerge all the stronger from our campaign.

Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in Syria

Torture and ill-treatment are widespread in Syrian detention and investigation centres, particularly during pre-trial detention. The risk of torture and ill-treatment is increased during periods of incommunicado detention. Torture and ill-treatment are used against political suspects and ordinary criminal suspects, women and men, the elderly and children. Over the years, Amnesty International has documented about 40 different methods of torture and ill-treatment used against detainees in Syria. “Confessions” extracted under duress are systematically used as evidence in Syrian courts, and the defendants’ claims of torture or ill-treatment are almost never investigated. In 2004 at least nine people died reportedly as a result of torture and ill-treatment while in custody.

Amnesty International documented the cases of more than 20 Syrian Kurdish children, aged between 14 and 17, who were reportedly tortured and ill-treated while detained for over three months in 2004. The children were allegedly beaten with electric cables, had their heads banged together, and were ordered to strip almost naked under threat of being beaten. They were also given electric shocks to their hands and feet and sensitive parts of the body, had their toe-nails pulled out; and were beaten with rifle butts.

Other methods of torture or ill-treatment systematically used in Syria include: the *dulab* (the tyre), whereby the victim is forced into a car tyre, which may be suspended, and beaten with cables, bamboo sticks or whips; the “German Chair”, whereby the victim is strapped to a metal chair with moving parts in which the backrest is lowered away from the body causing hyperextension of the spine and severe pressure on the victim’s neck and limbs; and the “frame”, whereby the victim’s limbs are tied to a large metal frame and the victim is then beaten. Detainees are also given electric

shocks to various parts of the body and detained in extremely poor and unhygienic conditions, such as in tiny, filthy, insect-infested grave-like cells.

Seraj Khalbous became critically ill apparently as a result of torture suffered while detained incommunicado from 12 September 2005 at al-Mezze and al-Fayha Political Security Branches in Damascus. He was beaten, repeatedly stamped on, hit with large sticks, threatened with anal rape, subjected to extreme cold and sleep deprivation, and forced to watch others being tortured, including with electric shocks. He was released on 25 October.

Torture and other ill-treatment in the ‘war on terror’ in Syria

A number of people suspected of “terrorist” activities have been arrested and tortured in Syria, with the apparent cooperation of Western intelligence agencies. Syria is one of the providers of detention centres to which the USA transfers alleged terror suspects without any legal process (a practice known as “rendition”) for interrogation, often under torture and ill-treatment.

According to Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer in the Middle East, “We pick up a suspect or we arrange for one of our partner countries to do it. Then the suspect is placed on civilian transport to a third country where, let’s make no bones about it, they use torture.” Robert Baer also told *BBC Radio 4*: “If you send a prisoner to Jordan you get a better interrogation. If you send a prisoner, for instance, to Egypt, you will probably never see him again, the same way with Syria” (*Transcript of ‘File on 4 – Rendition’*, 8 February 2005).

Amnesty International documented the following cases of four men alleged to have been involved in “terrorism”. All were held for significant periods in the notoriously inhumane, tiny and filthy underground “grave” cells at Palestine Branch of Military Intelligence in Damascus. All were tortured and ill-treated.

- **Maher Arar**, a dual Canadian/Syrian national, was arrested in September 2002 and deported to Syria from the USA via Jordan in October 2002. He was reportedly accused of having links with “terrorist groups”. He was held without charge for a year, tortured and ill-treated and released without charge in October 2003.
- **‘Abdallah al-Malki**, also a dual Canadian/Syrian national, was arrested in Syria in May 2002. He was tortured -- including beatings on his feet, “the tyre” and “the frame” -- while detained for 22 months and then released without charge.
- **Ahmed Abou El-Maati**, a Canadian national of Syrian and Egyptian origin, was detained and tortured for 11 weeks from 12 November 2001 after he travelled voluntarily to Syria. He was beaten with electric cables, had ice cold water poured on him and had cigarettes burned on his legs. He was then transferred to detention in Egypt, where he suffered further torture. He was released without charge in January 2004 and allowed to return to Canada on 30 March 2004.
- **Muhammad Haydar Zammar**, a Syrian-born German national, remains held without charge, reportedly in relation to alleged links to al-Qa’ida. He has received no visits since his arrest in November 2001, except for when he was reportedly interrogated in November 2002 by agents of German intelligence and criminal investigation agencies. US security forces were reportedly involved in his detention and interrogation in Morocco, where he was initially arrested, and in his secret transfer to Syria – on a US executive Gulfstream V Turbo jet that has reportedly transported at least 72 suspects.

What you can do

- Take action as part of AI's campaign – see www.amnesty.org and the campaign home page at <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/stoptorture-index-eng>
- Contact your national section/structure to get involved in their work on the campaign: see <http://web.amnesty.org/contacts/engindex> for contact details.
- Please write to the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad:

State that torture and other ill-treatment are human rights violations, condemned by the international community as a crime and an offence to human dignity and prohibited in all circumstances under international law.

Urge the Syrian government to:

- Establish and ensure the implementation of effective system-wide measures incorporating all the elements of Amnesty International's *12-Point Programme for the Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by Agents of the State* (AI Index: ACT 40/001/2005) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engact400012005>.
- Officially and publicly condemn torture and ill-treatment and order that these practices cease, making clear that they are prohibited absolutely and will not be tolerated.
- Ensure that all allegations of torture or ill-treatment are promptly, impartially and effectively investigated by a body independent of the alleged perpetrators.
- Ensure that anyone responsible for having committed, ordered or authorized torture or other ill-treatment be brought to justice in a fair trial.

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