

PUBLIC

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UA 201/08 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

SYRIA Hasan Younis Qasem (m), aged 26, student

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Pro-democracy activist Hasan Qasem was summoned to the General Intelligence Department, State Security Branch, in the Kafr Soussa district of Damascus, on 9 July, and is believed to be detained there incommunicado. He is in grave danger of torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and association.

Hasan Qasem is a member of the pro-democracy umbrella group Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC). Many of the group members have been arrested since a DDDNC meeting on 1 December 2007, when a steering committee was elected. Most of those arrested have been released after a few days; Hasan Qasem is the 14th of them known to be still in custody. The whereabouts of one of the male detainees are unknown; the 11 other male detainees are known to be held in 'Adra prison, near Damascus, while the one female detainee is held in the women's prison in Douma, again near Damascus.

Hasan Qasem is a fourth-year student at the arts faculty of Aleppo University.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The government began to crack down on the DDDNC a week after the 1 December meeting, with arrests of the group starting on 9 December. So far 48 DDDNC members have been arrested, of whom 34 were released within a few days. None of the 34 are known to have been charged. On 24 June the Cassation Court in Damascus rejected the appeal of 12 DDDNC detainees, who are now due to be tried before the Damascus Criminal Court on charges of "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which would affect the morale of the country" (Article 286 of the Syrian Penal Code), "weakening national sentiment" (Article 285), "forming an organization with the purpose of changing the economic or social status of the state" (Article 306) and "inciting racial or sectarian strife" (Article 307). It is not known when their trials will begin.

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

- expressing great concern that Hasan Qasem has been detained incommunicado since 9 July, when he was summoned to the General Intelligence Department in Damascus, and asking why he has been detained;
- calling on the authorities to release Hasan Qasem immediately unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that he will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture;
- urging the authorities to allow Hasan Qasem visits from his family immediately, and also access to a lawyer of his choosing and any medical treatment he may require.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: + 963 11 332 3410**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Interior  
His Excellency Major General Bassam Abdel Majid  
Ministry of Interior  
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 2223428**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice  
His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 666 2460**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
His Excellency Walid Mu'allim  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: + 963 11 3327620**  
**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 25 August 2008.