

EXTERNAL

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Prisoner of Conscience / Legal Concern 4 June 1997

**LEBANON** Elias Abu Rizq, 54, labour leader

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Elias Abu Rizq, a prominent Lebanese labour leader and the former leader of the General Labour Confederation (CGTL), was arrested on 30 May 1997 in Beirut. A magistrate ordered his arrest for pre-trial interrogation. He was charged with impersonating the head of the CGTL and usurping office under Articles 306 and 392 of the Lebanese Penal Code which carry seven and three years' imprisonment respectively. The charges came in the aftermath of CGTL elections on 21 April. The results of the elections, which produced a new leadership, were disputed by Elias Abu Rizq and the former CGTL leadership.

On 31 May 1997 Elias Abu Rizq was admitted to Ghosein hospital suffering from high blood pressure. He remains in hospital under detention.

Amnesty International is concerned at the legality of this arrest, particularly the applicability of articles 306 and 392 of the Penal Code which deal with impersonating and usurping civil and military authorities.

Amnesty International considers Elias Abu Rizq to be a prisoner of conscience, detained for his non-violent activities as a labour leader. The organization is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Elias Abu Rizq led a campaign of strikes and protests against the government's social and economic policies from 1993 to 1997. CGTL union elections were scheduled for April 1997. On 13 April police reportedly surrounded CGTL's headquarters at Sidon, arresting members of the leadership while new elections were organized. On 17 April the government published a decree effectively forcing CGTL to accept five new unions into affiliation. This decree was resisted by CGTL leaders who regarded it as an attempt from the government to shift the balance during the upcoming union elections.

The April elections led to a split in the labour movement. Elias Abu Rizq and his team contested the election results and insisted that they remained the legitimate leaders of the CGTL. Ghneim al-Zoghbi, who emerged victorious after the April elections, was recognised by the government as the new head of CGTL. Ghneim al-Zoghbi was responsible for bringing the charges against Elias Abu Rizq.

Abu Rizq's detention triggered widespread protest in Lebanon. A wide range of professional organizations and human rights groups have denounced his arrest as a violation of union freedoms and political rights.

Amnesty International has been informed that the Secretary General of the CGTL, Yasir Ne'meh was interrogated at length by a state prosecutor on 3 June 1997, but was not officially charged. His interrogation continues today.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express and airmail letters in Arabic, English, French or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the legality of the arrest and continued detention of Elias Abu Rizq;

- stating that Elias Abu Rizq is a prisoner of conscience, detained for his activities as a labour union leader;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Elias Hrawi  
Office of the President  
Ba'abda Palace  
Ba'abda, Beirut  
Republic of Lebanon  
**Fax: +961 1 425 393**  
**Telegrams: President Hrawi, Beirut, Lebanon**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency Rafiq al-Hariri  
Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and  
Minister of Post and Telecommunications  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Grand Serail  
Rue des Arts et Metiers  
Sanayeh, Beirut  
Republic of Lebanon  
**Fax: +961 1 200 469; +961 1 354 318**  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister al-Hariri, Beirut, Lebanon**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

His Excellency Bahij Tabbara  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
Palais de Justice, Beirut  
Republic of Lebanon  
**Fax: +961 1 422 957 (if voice ask for fax)**  
**Telegrams: Minister Of Justice, Beirut, Lebanon**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr. 'Adnan 'Addoum  
Prosecutor General  
Palais de Justice, Beirut  
Republic of Lebanon  
**Fax: +961 1 423 790**

and to diplomatic representatives of Lebanon accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 July 1997.