

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Health concern / Prisoners of conscience

14 February 1994

SYRIA

Ahmad Suwaidani, aged about 65

Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, Hadithe Murade, Dafi Jam'ani, 'Abd al-Hamid Miqdad, 'Adel Na'issa, Fawzi Rida and Mustafa Rustum

Amnesty International is extremely concerned about the health of Ahmad Suwaidani, a prisoner of conscience who has spent nearly 25 years in detention, who is reported to have been admitted to Teshmin Hospital in Damascus on 4 February 1994 in a serious condition. The exact causes of his ill-health are not known to Amnesty International, but he is said to have suffered a brain seizure, causing paralysis of the right side of his face and his right hand and leg. The organization is also concerned about the health of the seven other prisoners of conscience named above, held since their arrest between 1970 and 1972. They are all said to be in poor health, particularly Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, who is reported to be suffering from acute anaemia, rheumatism and a stomach ulcer. Amnesty International's concern is heightened by the fact that, over the past 14 months, three long-term prisoners of conscience have died either in custody, or soon after release.

Ahmad Suwaidani is one of a group of elderly prisoners of conscience who have been detained for over two decades. Three of them, Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi, the former President of Syria, Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil, a former Minister of Interior and Salah Jadid, a former Chief-of-Staff of the Syrian Army and senior official of the Ba'th Party, died during the last 14 months. Nour al-Din al-Atassi and Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil suffered serious health problems as a result of which they were released in August 1992, but died a few months later, in December 1992 and April 1993 respectively. Salah Jadid died in custody in August 1993. The government said he died from natural causes, although there was no independent autopsy or inquest into his death. Amnesty International wrote to President Hafez al-Assad in August 1993 expressing grave concern about this emerging pattern of deaths among this group of prisoners and about the well-being of the eight people named above. The organization received no response.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ahmad Suwaidani, a diplomat and member of the Ba'th Party Regional Command was arrested on 11 July 1969 at Damascus Airport after returning from Iraq. He was suspected of being a pro-Iraqi Ba'thist. Since then he has been detained in al-Mezze Military Prison in Damascus, and has never been brought before a judge or allowed to contact a lawyer. However, he has been allowed family visits. In July 1989, to mark his 20 years in detention, he went on hunger-strike to demand his release.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams, telexes and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern about the health of Ahmad Suwaidani and seeking assurances that he is being provided with all necessary medical treatment;
- expressing concern about the health of the seven other men named above, and urging that they, too, receive all necessary medical treatment;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Ahmad Suwaidani and the other seven prisoners of conscience listed above.

APPEALS TO

His Excellency

President Hafez al-Assad

Presidential Palace

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: President Al-Assad, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: 419160 munjed sy

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS 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 28 March 1994.