

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 24/02/96

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Date: 29 January 1996

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>MEDICAL CONCERN</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE DETAINED SINCE THE 1980s: SOME IN NEED OF MEDICAL CARE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SYRIA</p>
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Mustafa al-Hussain

'Umar al-Hagak

Muhammad Khzir Khalaf

'Abd al-Karim 'Issa

'Abdalla Qabbara

Hikmat Mirjanah

and

Yassin al-Haj Salih, Yusha' al-Khatib, Mazin Shamshin, Firas Yunis,

Amnesty International has received reports that ten prisoners have been moved to Tadmur military prison after refusing to sign a statement promising that they will dissociate themselves from all past political activities and express support for the present regime. They were detained between 1980 and 1990 before being sentenced in 1994. Tadmur military prison is renowned for its harsh conditions and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners is common. Amnesty International fears that these men may be tortured or subjected to ill-treatment whilst in Tadmur military prison. 'Abdalla Qabbara is already reported to have been tortured during his interrogation.

It is additionally concerned at reports that some of the men are in need of medical attention. Two of them -- Mustafa al-Hussain and Muhammad Khzir Khalaf -- are said to be suffering from mental illness. 'Abdalla Qabbara reportedly suffers from diabetes, 'Umar al-Hagak from scabies, 'Abd al-Karim 'Issa from tuberculosis and Hikmat Mirjanah from an unspecified "eye disease". Amnesty International is especially concerned about these men since it is not known whether they have access to doctors or adequate medical attention. Lack of adequate medical care for prisoners is common in Syria.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Eight of the men are among more than 100 people arrested between 1980 and 1990 in connection with the unauthorized Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB), *al-Hizb al-Shuq'i al-Maktab al-Siyassi*. Most of those arrested during this time were released at the end of 1991 or during the first half of 1992 at the time of large-scale amnesties. There was a further amnesty at the end of 1995 to mark the anniversary of President al-Assad's 25th year in power and as many as 1,000 prisoners are believed to have been released. However, these eight men, who were arrested between 1980 and 1987, are still

imprisoned. Their trials began in 1992 on charges of membership of, or links with the CPPB and in 1994 they were sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to terms of imprisonment of between 12 and 15 years' imprisonment. One of them - Yassin al-Haj Salih - was due for release in December 1995 having already served 15 years in detention.

The other two men have also spent long periods of time in pre-trial detention before being brought to trial in 1992 and sentenced in 1994. Both were imprisoned for their links with the Party for Communist Action (*Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i*). Firas Yunis was arrested in 1981 and tried only 13 years later, in October 1994. He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Mazin Shamsin was arrested in 1990 and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in April 1994.

All ten men are considered to be prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International as they have neither used nor advocated violence and are imprisoned solely on the basis of their political beliefs or affiliation.

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To: Medical professionals  
From: Medical Office / Middle East Regional Program  
Date: 29 January 1996

### *MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION*

**Prisoners of conscience detained since the 1980s:  
Some in need of medical care**

**SYRIA**

Keywords

Theme: POCs/ill-health

Please see the information attached about ten men who were recently transferred to Tadmur military prison, a detention centre where conditions are notoriously bad and ill-treatment is frequent. All are adopted as prisoners of conscience and have spent long periods in detention without trial before being sentenced in 1994. Six are known to have medical problems and there is concern that their transfer will further worsen their situation.

#### **Recommended Actions**

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

- expressing concern that these men remain in prison although they have committed no violent crime
- noting that, while many other political prisoners benefited from a Presidential amnesty in November 1995, these men are reported to have been exempted from the terms of the amnesty because of their refusal to sign a statement renouncing their political beliefs
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience
- noting that six are known to be in need of medical attention and seeking assurances that they will be provided with all the medical care they require while they remain in prison (Mustafa al-Hussain, Umar al-Hayak, Muhammad Khzir Khalaf, Abd al-Karim Issa, Abdalla Qabbara and Hikmat Mirjanah)
- urging that all are permitted open access to family and lawyers

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency  
 President Hafez al-Assad  
 Presidential Palace  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams:** President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria  
**Telefax:** 419160 pr@sp1.sy  
**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

His Excellency  
 Dr Muhammad Harba  
 Minister of the Interior  
 Ministry of the Interior  
 Merjeh Circle  
 Damascus  
 Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams:** Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria  
**Telefax:** 411016 AFIRS SY

His Excellency  
 Husayn Hassun  
 Minister of Justice  
 Ministry of Justice  
 Al-Nasr Street  
 Damascus  
 Syrian Arab Republic

The prison director  
 Tadmur military prison  
 Syrian Arab Republic

**COPIES TO:**

His Excellency  
 Dr Iyad al-Shatti  
 Minister of Health  
 Ministry of Health  
 al-Majlis al-Nigabi Street  
 Damascus  
 Syrian Arab Republic

and Syrian diplomatic representatives in your own country.