

EXTERNAL

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**IMPRISONED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS  
SYRIA**

It is now ten years since the arrest in 1980 of some 100 doctors, dentists and veterinarians, following widespread agitation in Syria for political reforms, including an end to the state of emergency in force since 1963. Seven of those arrested at the time have been released, and two are reported to have been executed. The continued detention without trial of four other doctors has been confirmed, and they have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International. Amnesty International has been unable to obtain further information on the situation of other detainees. The organization is unaware of their present whereabouts and is unable to confirm either their continued detention or release. However, the organization remains concerned that most, if not all of them, continue to be held in detention without charge or trial.

All are believed to have been arrested solely for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression. Despite repeated requests, including during discussions in June 1989 between Amnesty International delegates and Syrian government representatives, the government has failed to provide any information on the whereabouts and well-being of those detained.

Background

The main provisions of the Syrian constitution which specify the freedoms of the citizen remain suspended under the terms of Military Order 2 of 17 March 1963 declaring a State of Emergency.

The State of Emergency Law gives the security forces wide powers to arrest and administratively detain anyone suspected of "endangering security and public order". The Martial Law Governor (the Prime Minister), or his deputy, is empowered to delegate to anyone the powers to administratively detain, investigate, or restrict the freedom of persons in respect to meetings, residence, travel and passage. These powers have been delegated to the security forces and in practice have been used in such a way as to result in thousands of arbitrary arrests.

The vast majority of political detainees in Syria are held without charge or trial, many for long periods. Families are given no official notification of the arrest, place of detention or subsequent movements of detainees and must obtain such information through their own efforts. Reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees are common. Such treatment is facilitated by the extensive powers of arbitrary arrest and detention conferred on the security forces which enables them to hold detainees for indefinite periods without any external supervision of their cases.

In 1978 a movement began among the legal profession in Syria to amend legislation to prevent human rights abuses, reinstate the effective role of the judiciary and protect the rights of the individual. A resolution for the implementation of safeguards against human rights abuses was passed by the Syrian Bar Association in June 1978. Among other things, it called for the lifting

of the State of Emergency.

Support for the initiatives of the Bar Association was forthcoming from within the Syrian medical profession and other professional bodies and in March 1980 joint meetings of the Syrian professional associations were held in several Syrian cities. The meetings were attended by members of the lawyers', medical, dentists', pharmacists, and engineers' associations, and called for political reforms.

On 21 March 1980 a General Conference of the Syrian Medical Association met and voted for a number of demands including the following:

- " . Reaffirmation of the principle of the citizen's rights to freedom of expression, thought and belief;
- . Denunciation of any kind of violence, terror, sabotage and armed demonstration, whatever the reasons and justifications;
- . Abolition of Exceptional Courts
- . Release or trial of all detainees. "

Ten days later, on 31 March 1980, lawyers in Damascus organized a one-day strike in protest at the failure of the authorities to implement the recommendations which were being made. The strike called for an end to the State of Emergency and for reforms of the emergency legislation; for the abolition of state security courts; for a boycott of such courts by all lawyers; and for the release of all untried detainees. It was supported by other branches of the Bar Association and by other professional associations, including members of the Syrian Medical Association, throughout Syria.

Shortly after the strike, on 9 April 1980, the national congresses and regional assemblies of the Medical, Engineers' and Bar Associations were dissolved. In the days that followed numerous members of these professions were arrested and detained without charge.

In 1983 Amnesty International published a report on its concerns in Syria, based on a memorandum that had been previously submitted to the Syrian Government. It also published a second report on the arrests of the professionals, which included a list of some 100 medical professionals, dentists and veterinarians arrested following the March 1980 events. Further information on the cases was published in 1984.

Since the arrests in March 1980 Amnesty International has learned of the release of only seven of the detained doctors, dentists and veterinarians and of the execution of two doctors in late 1980 and early 1981. Despite repeated calls for information on the whereabouts and fate of the remainder, no response has been given by the Syrian authorities. The organization has been able to confirm the continued detention of four of the doctors and has adopted them as prisoners of conscience. According to the information received, Hassan Najjar, a health professional (exact specialization unknown) from Aleppo, and Muhammad Nino, a doctor from Idlib, are being held in 'Adra Civil Prison and Tadmur Military Prison respectively. The exact places of detention of Muhammad As'ad Bisata and Ahmad Bushi, both health professionals from Aleppo, remain unknown, but their continued detention without trial has been confirmed.

Amnesty International believes that these four individuals have been imprisoned solely for their participation in the one-day national strike of March 1980 and the events leading up to it, and that their continued detention without trial is a form of punishment for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression. Although the authorities' refusal to provide information prevents Amnesty International from confirming either continued detention or

release of the remaining 86 individuals whose names follow, the organization believes that the majority still remain in prison, ten years after their arrest, and continues to investigate their cases.

In June 1989 an Amnesty International delegation visited Syria and held discussions with government officials, the first such contact since 1978. The discussions centred on Amnesty International's concerns in Syria, including prolonged detention without trial of political prisoners, the torture and ill-treatment of detainees, and the death penalty. Syrian government officials expressed their willingness to establish a dialogue with Amnesty International and to respond to all its communications. The Amnesty International delegates submitted the names of some 450 prisoners on whose behalf the organisation is working, among them the 90 medical professionals. The government stated that it would respond in detail on each case. However, no response has been received to date.

Amnesty International is once more calling on the Syrian Government to account for the whereabouts of these individuals and is calling for their immediate release unless the government is able to sustain serious criminal charges against any individual.

Date: 21 May 1990

**DOCTORS, DENTISTS AND VETERINARIANS BELIEVED TO BE  
DETAINED SINCE 1980 IN SYRIA**

Name	Town	Other information
1. Zahi 'Abbadi	Aleppo	General practitioner (GP)
2. Muwaffaq 'Abd al-Dayim	Homs	GP, born 1955
3. Khulud al-'Abdallah	Damascus	--
4. Tahsin al-'Abdallah	Aleppo	--
5. Hisham Zain al-'Abidin	Latakiyya	--
6. Muhammad 'Uthman al-Abrash	--	Dentist, born 1955
7. Muhammad 'Afissa	Latakiyya	--
8. 'Abd al-Bari al-Akhras	--	--
9. Mustafa 'Araqil	Idlib	Possibly held in Tadmur prison [* see footnote]
10. Hisham 'Arna'ut	Hama	--
11. Dr 'Assaf	Hama	--
12. 'Abd al-Qahir al-Atassi	Homs	GP, unmarried
13. 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Attura	Idlib	--
14. Yasir 'Awni 'Awna	Tartus	GP, born 1953, married. Possibly held in Tadmur prison [* see footnote]
15. Muwaffaq 'Ayyash	Hama	--
16. Farhan al-Azhari	Homs	Veterinary surgeon, born 1956 unmarried
17. Muhammad Barad'i	Tartus	GP, possibly held in Tadmur prison [* see footnote]
18. Nimr Barazi	Hama	--
19. Muhammad As'ad Bisata	Aleppo	Detention confirmed; place of detention unknown. Adopted as POC.
20. Muhammad Faiz Bismar	Homs	Gynaecologist
21. 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin 'Abd al-Qadir Bitar	Idlib	Veterinary surgeon, born 1954

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Other information</u>
22.	'Abd al-Majid Bin 'Abd al-Qadir Bitar	Idlib	Veterinary surgeon, born 1952
23.	Ahmad al-Bushi	Aleppo	Detention confirmed; place of detention unknown. Adopted as POC
24.	Ahmad Dalati	Homs	Was studying ophthalmology at time of arrest. Possibly held in Tadmur [* see footnote]
25.	Muhammad Nizar al-Daqr	Damascus	Professor of dermatology. Married. Possibly held in Tadmur [* see footnote]
26.	'Abd al-Hamid Diab	Homs	GP
27.	Ibrahim Faris	Latakiyya	Paediatrician, born 1950. Married with three children
28.	Mustafa Farji	Aleppo	--
29.	Fu'ad Fi'awi	Hama	--
30.	'Abd al-Majid Ghazal	Aleppo	--
31.	Muhammad 'Ali Ghazal	Aleppo	--
32.	Ghassan Mustafa al-Haj	Idlib	--
33.	Muhammad Halima	Tartus	GP
34.	Usama al-Hashimi	Aleppo	Dentist, unmarried
35.	Ahmad Hazifa	Tartus	--
36.	Rafiq Ibrahim Ibrahim	Hama	GP
37.	Marwan al-Idlibi	Damascus	--
38.	Radwan 'Iqrin	Aleppo	--
39.	Jalal Jalaghi	Hama	--
40.	Darwish Janu	Damascus	GP, born 1955
41.	Husain Jarrah	Aleppo	--
42.	Nadim Jawda	Aleppo	--
43.	Mahmud al-Jaziri	Damascus	Professor of Surgery, Medicine Faculty, Damascus University
44.	Mahmud Kassab	Homs	Surgeon
45.	Salih al-Khoja	Damascus	--
46.	Adib Kirdawi	Hama	--
47.	'Abd al-Rahman Kittanji	Aleppo	--
48.	Kamal Koba Dar	Aleppo	--
49.	Walid Ma'mar	Idlib	--
50.	Hassan al-Mufti	Latakiyya	Gynaecologist, born 1954, married, one child
51.	Naji Muhabek	Aleppo	--
52.	Qasim Musa	Latakiyya	Ear, nose, throat specialist, born 1948, married, 3 children

Name	Town	Other information
53. Hassan Najjar	Aleppo	Detention confirmed; held in 'Adra Civil Prison. Adopted as POC.
54. Munib Zahri al-Najjar	Homs	Veterinary surgeon
55. Muhammad Nino	Idlib	GP. Detention confirmed; held in Tadmur Military Prison. Adopted as POC.
56. Muhammad Mukhlis Qannut	Hama	Surgeon, born 1955, unmarried
57. Ahmad Qaraquz	Homs	GP, born 1956, married
58. 'Ayisha Qutaish	Aleppo	GP (female)
59. 'Arfan Rashidqi	Aleppo	--
60. Muhammad Mansur al-Rifa'i	Homs	Ear, nose, throat specialist. Unmarried
61. Muhammad 'Akif Rustum	Latakiyya	Paediatrician, born 1950, married, three children
62. Hassan Sa'id	Aleppo	GP
63. Badr al-Din al-Safadi	Damascus	--
64. Bashir Saifu	Damascus	--
65. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Salih	Deir al-Zor	--
66. Taisir Samsam	Hama	--
67. Muhammad Zakariyya Saqqal	Aleppo	--
68. 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Abd al-	Idlib	-- Qadir Sawwan
69. Riad 'Abd al-Qadir Sawwan	Idlib	--
70. Sa'id Shakir	Latakiyya	--
71. 'Abd al-Qadir Shallat	Idlib	--
72. Fawwaz Ahmad Sharbak	Homs	Ear, nose, throat specialist. Married.
73. Jamal Shuman	Latakiyya	GP, born 1957, married.
74. Muhammad Nasir al-Siba'i	Homs	Anaesthetist, born 1945, married, three children
75. Fadil Sirajiyya	Aleppo	Ophthalmologist
76. Khadr al-Sutari	Homs	--
77. Muhammad Dib Tahmaz	Hama	GP, born 1945
78. Fawwaz Taqi al-Din	Homs	Veterinary surgeon, unmarried.
79. 'Abd al-Rahman Tutu	Idlib	Born 1953, married.
80. 'Abd al-Ra'uf 'Ubaid	Idlib	Professor of Neurology
81. Qaddur 'Ubaidan	Idlib	GP, born 1940, married, five

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Other information</u>
		children.
82. Usama 'Urfali	Latakiyya	GP
83. 'Abd al-Salam 'Uthman	Tartus	Dentist, born 1949, married.
84. Husam 'Uthman	Tartus	--
85. Mustafa 'Uthman	Tartus	Surgeon, married.
86. 'Adil 'Uthmani	Latakiyya	Dentist
87. Majid 'Uthmani	Latakiyya	--
88. 'Abd al-Fattah al-Wadi	Homs	--
89. 'Abd al-Latif Yunusu	Idlib	Veterinary surgeon. Born 1942, Married, seven children.
90. Sa'id Zaidan	Idlib	GP, born 1956, unmarried.

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\* Note: Since receiving information on the arrests of medical professionals in 1980, Amnesty International has received various reports that some of them are detained in Tadmur Military prison. AI has not been able to confirm these reports, however, and continues to investigate these cases.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Town \_\_\_\_\_ Other information \_\_\_\_\_

INTERNAL

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To : Medical professionals  
 From: Medical Office / Research Department - Middle East  
 Date: 21 May 1990

**MEDICAL LETTER-WRITING ACTION**

**Imprisoned Health Professionals  
 SYRIA**

**Keywords**

Theme: detention without trial/execution/medical association/POC

Profession/affiliation: dentist/doctor/general practitioner/gynaecologist/ medical  
 academic/neurologist/paediatrician/surgeon/veterinarian

**Summary**

Medical groups participated in an action on Syria starting November 1983 focussing on some 100 medical, dental and veterinary professionals who had been arrested in March 1980. Actions were renewed in 1984 and in April 1989. Prior to last year's action, AI had learned that seven of the detained professionals had been released and two executed. AI has since been able to confirm the continued detention of four of the doctors, who have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by AI. The others remain the subject of investigation by the organisation. We are now making a major effort to secure the release of all those health professionals arrested in the wake of the one day national strike of March 1980 and who may still remain in detention. Please see the external details attached.

**Recommended Actions**

Groups are asked to encourage letters from a wide range of health professionals - in a private capacity and/or as AI member - to the government addresses given below. In their letters, groups should be:

- expressing deep concern about the continuing detention of doctors, dentists and other health professionals arrested in 1980 following a one-day strike supported by professional associations; you could refer to reports that some 90 doctors are still being held without charge or trial ten years after arrest.
- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Hassan Najjar, Muhammad Nino, Muhammad As'ad Bisata and Ahmad al-Bushi. State that AI believes that these four individuals are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for their non-violent participation in the one-day national strike of 31 March 1980 and the events leading up to it, and that their continued detention without trial is a form of punishment for the non-violent exercise of their right to freedom of expression.
- seeking information about the whereabouts and living conditions

<u>Name</u>	<u>Town</u>	<u>Other information</u>
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of other medical professionals arrested in March 1980 and still remaining in prison.

- urging that those still imprisoned be immediately released if they are not to be brought to trial and if no evidence of involvement in any recognizably criminal activity can be produced by the authorities.

#### **ADDRESSES**

His Excellency President Hafez al-Assad Presidential Palace Damascus Syrian Arab Republic	His Excellency Mahmud al-Zu'bi Prime Minister Office of the Prime Minister 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street Damascus Syrian Arab Republic
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His Excellency Dr Iyad al-Shatti Minister of Health al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street Damascus Syrian Arab Republic	His Excellency Muhammad Harba Minister of the Interior Ministry of the Interior Damascus Syrian Arab Republic
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Letters should also be sent to the Syrian diplomatic representative in your country with a copy of the names attached to this action

- expressing concern at the reported prolonged imprisonment without charge or trial of a large number of health professionals in Syria
- asking for the help of the diplomatic representative in clarifying the situation of those named
- urging that the Syrian authorities release immediately those health professionals still in untried detention, after almost ten years, if they are not to be tried without delay for a recognizably criminal offence

#### **Approaches to national medical associations**

Groups should also write to their medical, dental and veterinary associations, as well as specialist bodies (eg. paediatrics, neurology) concerning the named prisoners. Letters should

- . emphasise that the prisoners have been held for ten years without charge or trial.
- . urge the association to do whatever they can to help the prisoners to obtain freedom. This could include the association writing to government members, to the Syrian Medical Association, to regional associations (see addresses below), issuing a press release, including information about the cases in the association journal, etc.

Letters from medical groups may be sent to the Syrian Medical Association:



Name Town Other information

Islamic Medical Association 18 rue de Russie Tunis Tunisia (Attention: Dr Hamouda Ben Slama)

**Publicity**

In addition, groups should try to get publicity on these detentions in the medical press. You could stress the fact that the detained doctors have now spent a decade in detention without charge or trial and that the government has at no time released information about their cases. The Section press officer may be contacted about the possibility of press elsewhere.

If your group receives any replies or has any letters or articles published please send copies to the IS (Medical Office).

**Embassy visits**

The detention of a group of prisoners without charge or trial for a decade is sufficiently grave to merit an approach to the embassy to discuss the cases.

If an embassy visit fits in with section planning, you might discuss with the section campaign coordinator, an approach on these cases as well as other issues which the section might want to raise.