

EXTERNAL

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*MEDICAL CONCERN*

**@SEVEN PRISONERS IN NEED OF MEDICAL CARE  
£SYRIA**

Amnesty International has recently received information about seven prisoners in Syria who are reported to be in ill-health and in need of medical care. Four have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International and it is believed that the other three may also be prisoners of conscience held solely for their political beliefs or sympathies. None has been brought to trial, although they have been imprisoned for periods of between four and ten years. They are held without legal recourse, with little access to medical attention and in some instances with infrequent access to outside contact.

The prisoners were all arrested for involvement or suspected involvement in the banned Party for Communist Action (PCA), *Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i*. The PCA was founded in August 1976 and was originally called the League for Communist Action. It has criticized both the policies of the present government of Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood's violent opposition campaign. Among other things, it has demanded greater democratic freedom and the release of all political prisoners in Syria. Since its foundation the party has faced periodic suppression and widespread arrests of its members. Hundreds of PCA members or suspected members have been arrested or detained at different times since the party was founded in 1978. Many have allegedly been tortured and some are said to have died in custody as a result of torture. Over 500 members and suspected members of the PCA are currently believed to be held in detention without charge or trial, many of whom have been adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International.

The four who have been adopted as prisoners of conscience are the following:

. **Mustafa KHALIFA**, aged 43, topographer. Mustafa Khalifa was arrested in 1982 in connection with the PCA and has since been held without trial. He is reported to have suffered from bladder problems for some time which are now causing him difficulties and he is said to be without any proper medical attention. He is reported to have had surgery in the lower abdominal region in 1985. No further details are available. Mustafa Khalifa is held in Saidnaya Prison, near Damascus. His wife, Sahar al-Bunni, was arrested in 1987, also in connection with the PCA and is still held without trial. She too has been adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

. **Munif MULHIM**, aged 41, mechanical engineer. Munif Mulhim was arrested in August 1981. The authorities were said to have been seeking his arrest since 1978. Munif Mulhim is said to be suffering from severe genital inflammation; earlier reports suggested that he may have been

suffering from a genital tumour. Although he is reported to have had some urogenital problem for a considerable period of time, it has not been possible to clarify the nature of his symptoms. He is held in Tadmur Military Prison where medical care is said to be virtually non-existent and Amnesty International believes that he is without any proper medical attention. His two brothers and their wives were all arrested in August 1987 and are also imprisoned without charge or trial.

. **Lina al-MIR**, aged 30, single, medical student. Lina al-Mir was arrested on 13 August 1987 and was a 5th year medical student at the time. She had previously been detained in 1984, also on suspicion of having links with the PCA, but was released the same year for medical reasons. Since her re-arrest in 1987 she has been held in Fara' Falastin detention centre in Damascus. She is reported to have long-standing heart problems which have necessitated her admission from prison to al-Mezze military hospital on more than one occasion. She is said to be allowed family visits only once every few months.

. **May al-HAFEZ**, aged 36, single, lecturer. May al-Hafez was a lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering at Aleppo University at the time of her arrest in 1987. She was first arrested on 27 August 1987 in Aleppo and detained in Fara' Falastin until 2 October of the same year when she was released, apparently due to ill-health. She is reported to have received hospital treatment following her release in October 1987 but to have been re-arrested a few weeks later. May al-Hafez is reported to suffer from sickle cell anaemia and is currently said to be in need of care. She, too, is thought to be permitted family visits only once every few months.

Amnesty International believes that the three named below may also be prisoners of conscience and is currently investigating their cases.

. **Akram al-BUNNI**, aged 35, medical student. Akram al-Bunni was a 5th year medical student at the University of Aleppo. He was arrested on 11 August 1987 and is held in Fara' Falastin. Akram al-Bunni was previously detained for nearly three years between 1978 and 1980 and shortly after his release the authorities are reported to have again sought his arrest for PCA activities; during this period his wife was taken into custody on a number of occasions and held hostage. Both his brother and sister are currently imprisoned (his sister, Sahar al-Bunni, is married to Mustafa Khalifa whose case is outlined above).

Akram al-Bunni is reported to suffer from back problems which are said to be the result of torture and ill-treatment. He is reported to have been severely tortured following arrest and to have suffered damage to the vertebral column as a result. He is at present said to be without medical attention. Since arrest in 1987 Akram al-Bunni is said to have received family visits on only one or two occasions.

. **Nizar MARADNI**, aged 35, engineering tutor at the University of Damascus. Nizar Maradni was arrested on 19 September 1987. He appears to have been arrested after he and another engineer had sent a pamphlet to the Union of Engineers about the restoration of democratic freedoms in Syria. Nizar Maradni is reported to have been tortured in Fara' Falastin following his arrest. He is said to have been suspended from the ceiling by his wrists and later dropped to the floor, resulting in a fractured pelvis.

. **Ghassan QASSIS**, aged 31, single, lecturer. Ghassan Qassis was a lecturer at the Faculty of Civil Engineering at the University of Damascus at the time of his arrest. He was reportedly arrested in September 1987 in a street in Damascus by members of the Military Intelligence (*al-Mukhabarat al-'Askariyya*). The security services had apparently been seeking to arrest him in connection with the PCA. He was shot in the hands at the time of arrest and is then reported to have been tortured and suspended from the ceiling by his wrists for prolonged periods. He is said to have suffered paralysis of the muscles of the hands and it appears that he did not receive

proper medical attention following injury and ill-treatment. It is not known how much movement he now has in his hands. Ghassan Qassis is held in Fara' Falastin.

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Amnesty International is concerned for the well-being of these prisoners who remain without adequate care and attention. It is calling on the Syrian government to provide urgent assurances that they will be given immediate access to the medical care they require. Amnesty International is urging the unconditional release of Mustafa Khalifa, Munif Mulhim, Lina al-Mir and May al-Hafez and is similarly calling for the release of Akram al-Bunni, Nizar Maradni and Ghassan Qassis without further delay unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a fair trial.

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To: Medical professionals  
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Middle East  
Date: 15 October 1991

*MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION*

**SEVEN PRISONERS IN NEED OF MEDICAL CARE  
SYRIA**

**Keywords**

Theme: ill-health/medical care/POCs/detention without charge or trial/ill-treatment and torture

Profession/association: medical students/ engineering students and lecturers

**Summary**

The attached gives details of four prisoners of conscience and three possible prisoners of conscience who have been arrested for involvement or suspected involvement in the banned Party for Communist Action (*Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i*). All are said to be in need of medical attention. None of the detainees has been brought to trial or formally charged, although they have now been held for periods of up to ten years. Some were badly tortured following their arrest.

**Recommended Actions**

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

(For Mustafa Khalifa, Munif Mulhim, Lina al-Mir, May al-Hafez, prisoners of conscience):

- expressing concern that Mustafa Khalifa, Munif Mulhim, Lina al-Mir and May al-Hafez have been detained for periods of between four and ten years for involvement with the Party for Communist Action, although none has been charged with any violent crime nor brought to trial
- noting that they are all said to be in need of medical attention and urging that they receive the medical care they require
- urging that they are released from prison on the grounds that they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for expression of opinion

(For Akram al-Bunni, Nizar Maradni and Ghassan Qassis, possible prisoners of conscience):

- making the first two points outlined above and seeking information on the justification for their detention
- urging that unless they are charged with recognizably criminal offences and given a prompt and fair trial they should be released without delay

Letters may also make general enquiries about the health care facilities available in the detention centres where these prisoners are held. Letters to the Minister of Health in particular (and copies to the Medical Association), could raise the issue of health care in prisons, expressing concern at reports that detainees frequently do not have access to adequate medical attention. Letters could cite Principle 1 of the United Nations *Principles of Medical Ethics*<sup>1</sup> which states:

"Health personnel, particularly physicians, charged with the medical care of prisoners and detainees have a duty to provide them with protection of their physical and mental health and treatment of disease of the same quality and standard afforded to those who are not imprisoned or detained."

Reference could also be made to the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted 9 December 1988, Article 24 of which states:

"A proper medical examination shall be offered to a detained or imprisoned person as promptly as possible after his admission to the place of detention or imprisonment, and thereafter medical care and treatment shall be provided whenever necessary. This care and treatment shall be provided free of charge."

### Addresses

His Excellency  
President Hafez al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: President al-Assad,  
Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: PRESPL 419160 sy**

His Excellency 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam  
Vice-President  
Office of the President  
Presidential Palace  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Vice-President Khaddam,  
Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: PRESPL 41960 sy**

His Excellency Khaled al-Ansari  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice

His Excellency Muhammad Harba  
Minister of the Interior  
Merjeh Circle

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations' Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the role of health personnel, particularly physicians, in the protection of prisoners and detainees against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Adopted 18 December 1982.

Nasr Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Justice Minister,  
Damascus, Syria**

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister,  
Damascus, Syria**

His Excellency Dr Iyad al-Shatti  
Minister of Health  
Ministry of Health  
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Health Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: HEALTH 412655, sy**

**Copies to:**

Maître Hassan Hamdan  
President  
Syrian Bar Association  
Rue Mayssaloun  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

Dr M. Cherif Bakle  
Ordre des médecins syriens  
Place de l'Etoile  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic

**and to diplomatic representatives of Syria in your own country**