

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 178/96 (MDE 24/12/96, 12 July 1996) - Possible prisoner of conscience / Medical concern / Detention beyond expiry of sentence

SYRIA Mustafa Tawfiq Fallah, aged 61

Mustafa Tawfiq Fallah, one of the longest serving possible prisoners of conscience worldwide, was released on 11 May 1998. He had served over 27 years in detention -- more than 13 years beyond the expiry of his sentence. He is reported to be in poor health.

Mustafa Tawfiq Fallah, a former officer in the Syrian army, was arrested in May 1970 in connection with his involvement in the pro-Iraqi Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party. In 1971 he was brought before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), notorious for using procedures which fall far short of international fair trial standards, in a mass trial involving 350 civilian and military detainees. He was charged with "offences against the security of the state and public order" and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

Thirty prisoners of conscience and political prisoners are known to have been released since May 1998, apparently following a presidential amnesty. However, media reports suggest that more than 300 additional prisoners may have been released though this has not yet been officially confirmed.

Among those released were prisoners of conscience Riad al-Turk and Khalil Brayez, who served prison sentences of over 18 and 27 years respectively.

No further action is required by the Urgent Action network. Many thanks to all who took part in this appeal.