

EXTRA 74/99

Health concern

21 June 1999

SYRIADoha 'Ashur al-'Askari (f)

Amnesty International is very concerned for the health of prisoner of conscience Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari. She went on hunger strike in 'Adra Prison on 10 June 1999 in protest at her continued detention despite the fact that her six year sentence has expired.

In a letter to Amnesty International last year the authorities confirmed that her sentence was due to end on 10 February 1999.

Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari was sentenced to six years' imprisonment by the Syrian Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), after an unfair trial, for her alleged involvement with the unauthorized Party for Communist Action (PCA). She had been in hiding for several years when the Political Security Department arrested her in February 1993. She was initially held incommunicado for two months and reportedly ill-treated.

Her elder brother Usama Ashur al-Askari was released in 1998 after serving a 15 year prison sentence, following a grossly unfair trial, also for suspected involvement with the PCA. He was also considered a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least five other prisoners of conscience are still detained after the expiry of their sentences. They include Fateh Jamus, Isam Dimashqi, Basil Hurani and 'Abd al-Halim Rumieh (all four should have been released in 1997) and Ratib Sha'bu (who should have been released in 1998). All were sentenced to 15 years in prison. In the past some political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, have been held for 13 years after their sentences expired.

Hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, are currently serving long-term prison sentences in Syria of up to 22 years. Among them are scores of Lebanese, Palestinian and Jordanian nationals arbitrarily detained or "disappeared" in Syria. Detainees are held in appalling prison conditions that fall seriously short of international human rights standards. Torture and ill-treatment of prisoners is routine, particularly during the interrogation stage of detention. These have led to deaths in custody and the serious deterioration of the health of detainees.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Arabic or your own language:

- expressing concern for the health of Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari, who went on hunger strike on 10 June 1999 in 'Adra Prison to protest at her continued detention, due to expire on 10 February 1999;
- seeking assurances that she is being humanely treated, including being allowed unrestricted access to a lawyer and to whatever medical care she may need;
- calling for her immediate and unconditional release;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations under Syrian law and human rights instruments to uphold the principles relating to the treatment of prisoners, including their immediate release after the expiry of their sentences.

APPEALS TO:

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

His Excellency
Dr Muhammad Harba
Minster of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Minister Interior, Damascus, Syria
Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428
Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY
Salutation: Your excellency

COPIES TO:

His Excellency
Nasser Qaddur
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Faxes: + 963 11 224 5747

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.