

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/17/98

Distrib: PG/SC

To: Health professionals
From: Medical Office / Middle East Program
Date: 15 September 1998

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

Access to medical care denied SYRIA

Theme: POC / ill-health / lack of adequate medical care

Summary

Amnesty International is concerned at reports that Nizar Nayyuf, a 36-year-old prisoner of conscience who has been detained since 1992 in harsh conditions, has been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease but is being denied appropriate specialist medical care.

In addition, Nizar Nayyuf is reportedly suffering from a number of other serious and painful medical complaints. These include ruptured intervertebrae disks, apparently caused by torture on the "German Chair" (a metal chair with moving parts, which causes acute hyperextension of the spine and severe pressure on the victim's neck and limbs), urological problems and a peptic ulcer.

Amnesty International is urging the Syrian authorities to provide Nizar Nayyuf with the medical care he needs in compliance with international human rights instruments to which Syria is a state party, and to allow him to be transferred promptly to a specialised institution or civil hospital where he can receive adequate medical care.

Recommended Actions

Appeals are requested from health professionals to the addresses below:

- stating that Amnesty International considers Nizar Nayyuf a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs and appealing for his immediate and unconditional release
- expressing serious concern at reports of Nizar Nayyuf's medical problems
- seeking information on his current state of health and asking for details of whatever medical treatment he is receiving, particularly following the diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease
- urging that Nizar Nayyuf receives all necessary medical care in accordance with provisions set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Syria is a state party, and in the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners [Rule 22/2]

ADDRESSES

His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria

COPIES TO:

His Excellency
Dr Muhammad Harba
Minster of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

His Excellency
Dr lyad al-Shatti
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

Faxes: + 963 11 222 3428

His Excellency
Nasser Qaddur
Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

“No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.

Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Access to medical care denied
SYRIA**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned at reports that Nizar Nayyuf, a 3-year-old prisoner of conscience who has been detained since 1992 in harsh conditions, has been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease but is being denied appropriate specialist medical care. In addition, Nizar Nayyuf is reportedly suffering from a number of other serious and painful medical complaints. These include ruptured intervertebrae disks, apparently caused by torture on the "German Chair" (a metal chair with moving parts, which causes acute hyperextension of the spine and severe pressure on the victim's neck and limbs), urological problems and a peptic ulcer.

Background information

Amnesty International has long-standing concerns about political prisoners in Syria. Since the implementation of a state of emergency in 1963, critics or opponents of the Syrian government have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without trial or subjected to unfair trial and sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. Prison conditions are poor and access to health care is believed to be extremely limited. Torture and ill-treatment is routine, particularly during the interrogation stage of detention. Dozens of deaths in custody have been reported in recent years.

Nizar Nayyuf was charged, together with nine others, in 1992 as a result of his involvement as a leading member in the Committee for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights [CDF].

He was subsequently sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment after a grossly unfair trial on charges of '*opposing the objectives of the revolution [...] and disseminating false information [...]*'. The other CDF members still serving prison sentences and adopted by Amnesty International as prisoners of conscience are Muhammad 'Ali Habib, Thabit Murad, 'Afif Muzhir and Bassam al-Shaykh. Their prosecution was apparently related to a CDF leaflet critical of Syrian presidential elections.

Nizar Nayyuf spent the first ten months of his sentence at Sadnaya Military Prison in Damascus, after which he was transferred to the desert Tadmur military prison, notorious for its harsh conditions. Soon after his arrival at the prison, he went on a hunger strike lasting 13 days in protest at the conditions. He is currently detained at Mezze Military Prison. He has reportedly been tortured and ill-treated throughout his detention.

After having been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, Nizar Nayyuf was referred to a military hospital. However, the specialist treatment that he needs, such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy, is not available at this hospital. Reportedly the authorities have made the transfer of Nizar Nayyuf to a specialised institution or a civil hospital conditional upon his disavowal of his political beliefs and requested him to distance himself from the CDF. Amnesty International considers the denial of essential medical treatment as a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In attaching conditions to the transfer of Nizar Nayyuf to another medical institution, the Syrian authorities are

violating Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a State Party, and the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners which state in Rule 22 [2]:

'Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals.'

Hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, have been in detention in Syria for up to 32 years, many of them after unfair trials by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). A large number of them were released in March and June 1998, some of them following an amnesty granted by President Hafez al-Assad. However, Amnesty International is aware of a number of prisoners of conscience and political detainees still being held beyond the expiry of their sentences and of others who need specialist medical treatment. Many of these medical conditions are the result of appalling prison conditions and of torture and ill-treatment as a routine practice. In 1996, AI appealed to the Syrian authorities after it learned of the death of a prisoner 24 hours after being released from prison. Karim al-Haj Hussain had spent the previous six months in increasingly poor health due to tuberculosis.

Recent actions expressing a medical concern on behalf of Syrian prisoners include:

MDE 24/13/98	FU on UA 145/98 [MDE 24/02/98] on Nu'man 'Abdu; Jurays al-Talli; Salama George Kayla; Mahmud 'Isa
MDE 24/17/96	Medical Letter Writing Action on 20 sick prisoners in Sednaya prison
MDE 24/06/96	Medical Letter Writing Action on the death of Karim al-Haj Hussain
