

PUBLIC

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16 March 2004

UA 110/04 Mass arrests/Fear of torture and ill-treatment

SYRIA Hundreds of Syrian Kurds

Hundreds of Syrian Kurds have reportedly been arrested, and around 25 have been killed, following violent clashes at a football match on 12 March. Those detained appear to have been targeted because of their Kurdish ethnicity: their whereabouts are now unknown, and this puts them at grave risk of torture and ill-treatment.

The arrests reportedly followed clashes between rival fans at a football match in the city of Qamishli. One team's supporters were mainly Kurdish, while the other's were mainly Arabs. The security forces reportedly opened fire into the crowd, killing between 19 and 22 Kurds. Three children were said to have been killed in a stampede as the crowds tried to escape. Following this incident clashes between Syrian Kurds and Syrian security forces broke out in towns and cities including Qamishli, Aleppo, al-Hassaka (all in the north) and the capital, Damascus. Hundreds of men, and boys as young as 14, were apparently arrested at their homes.

A number of those detained are reported to be Kurdish students at the university of Damascus. Names provided to Amnesty International are: Fahima Asko (f); Sourya Amko (f); 'Ali Huseini (f); Mizgin Huseini (f); Nasiba Huseini (f); Nizar Kousa (m); Jawdan Huseini (m); Jawan Hasse (m); Nawras Moura'i (m); Sipan Sayda (m); Sarteep Youssef (m); and Darchin Huchik (m).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

An estimated 1.5 million Kurds live in Syria, making up about 10% of the population, mostly in the Jazira area in the northeast of the country. Some 150,000 are denied Syrian nationality and civil rights. There is a history of violent confrontation between the Syrian authorities and the Kurds. In March 1986, during clashes at the Kurdish New Year festival of *Newroz*, several people were killed. In October 1992 Kurds marked the 30th anniversary of the census which deprived many of them of Syrian nationality and basic civil rights. In response Syrian security forces carried out mass arrests. In 1995 the Syrian authorities banned the traditional *Newroz* celebrations and dozens of Kurds were arrested. Seven Syrian Kurdish men were reportedly arrested at their homes in the early hours of 9 March 2004, the day after Kurdish demonstrations in Qamishli and al-Hassaka (see UA 107/04, MDE 24/018/2004, 12 March 2004).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that around 25 Kurds were shot dead by the security forces on 12 March in Qamishli, in apparent deliberate and arbitrary killings or use of excessive force;
- calling for an independent and impartial investigation into the killings, and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice in accordance with international standards for fair trial;
- asking to be told the names of those arrested, the reasons for their arrest, and where those still in custody are now held;
- asking that all detainees be given prompt access to their families, legal assistance and any necessary medical care;
- seeking assurances that all detainees are being treated humanely, in accordance with international standards on the treatment of detainees;
- expressing concern that those detained appear to be held solely for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs or their ethnic identity, and calling for them to be released immediately and unconditionally unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
President
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud
Interior Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Minister of the Interior

Ministry of

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Nizar al-Assasi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

Email: moj@net.sy

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 April 2004.