

URGENT ACTION

ELDERLY SYRIAN LAWYER HELD INCOMMUNICADO

A 78-year-old male human rights lawyer has been held incommunicado since his arrest by Syrian Political Security personnel on 14 October in Syria's capital, Damascus. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and association. He is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

On 13 October, an officer from Political Security telephoned **Haytham al-Maleh** and told him to report to the Political Security's branch in Damascus. Haytham al-Maleh refused to go, and was arrested at his office the next day. Although the Syrian authorities have refused to reveal his whereabouts, some Syrian human rights activists believe that he may be held in the Political Security's branch in Damascus.



The Syrian authorities have not stated why Haytham al-Maleh was arrested. However, he may be detained in connection with a phone interview that he gave to Baradda TV, a satellite channel based in Europe which opposes the Syrian authorities. In the interview, recorded in September 2009, Haytham al-Maleh discussed human rights and democracy in Syria.

Haytham al-Maleh suffers from diabetes and an overactive thyroid gland. Both conditions require the regular intake of appropriate medication, diet and medical supervision to ensure that his health remains sound.

Haytham al-Maleh has been imprisoned previously for his human rights work.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- Expressing concern that Haytham al-Maleh appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally if this is the case;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that he will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Urging the authorities to immediately allow him visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing, an appropriate diet and any medical treatment he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 NOVEMBER 2009 TO:

President
Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major S'aid Mohamed
Samour
Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
His Excellency Walid al-Mua'llim
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
'Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 7620
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The rights to freedom of expression and association are severely restricted in Syria, aided by “state of emergency” laws which have been in force since 1964. Human rights lawyers, particularly those defending political detainees, face many obstacles and threats in Syria. Some have been imprisoned solely for their human rights work. Others have been harassed and intimidated, including through travel bans and disciplinary action by Syria’s Bar Association, which licenses lawyers.

Haytham al-Maleh was previously imprisoned from 1980 until 1986 for his work for the Freedom and Human Rights Committee of the Syrian Lawyers’ Union. He is also the former head of the Human Rights Association in Syria (HRAS), which is banned by the Syrian authorities. Haytham al-Maleh has been regularly harassed and intimidated by the authorities for his human rights work. Prior to his arrest Haytham al-Maleh was defending Muhannad al-Hassani, a male human rights lawyer and prisoner of conscience awaiting trial for his legitimate human rights work.

The HRAS was established in 2001 by around 40 human rights defenders and lawyers. Its application to be registered by the authorities as an official organization was rejected on 10 February 2002 by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, which failed to specify any reason for the refusal as required by law. The HRAS challenged the Ministry’s decision before the Administrative Tribunal (Majlis al-Dawla) on 28 July 2002 but the case is still pending. Despite this, the HRAS remains a leading human rights NGO in Syria. Its members continue to face harassment and intimidation by the Syrian authorities.

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