

URGENT ACTION

ELDERLY PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE CHARGED

Haytham al-Maleh, a 78-year-old male prisoner of conscience, was charged by a military judge on 3 November with "conveying false news" about the human rights situation in Syria. He faces up to 15 years' imprisonment if convicted.

The charges against **Haytham al-Maleh** also include weakening national sentiment and slandering a governmental body. The charges relate to his public criticism of human rights violations and corruption by Syrian officials, including during a phone interview in September with Baradda TV, a Europe-based satellite channel.

Haytham al-Maleh was arrested on 14 October and held by State Security officials at a secret detention centre in the Kafr Sousa area of Damascus. He is now in 'Adra Prison, Damascus, awaiting trial before a military court whose proceedings fall far short of international standards for fair trial.

Amnesty International understands that he has access to the medication he needs for his diabetes and an overactive thyroid gland, as well as access to his family.

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

■ Urging the authorities to release Haytham al-Maleh immediately and unconditionally, and drop all charges against him as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 17 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

President

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

Minister of Interior

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

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Walid al-Mu'allim
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. This is the second update of UA: 281/09 (MDE 24/027/2009). Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/027/2009/en
www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/028/2009/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Haytham al-Maleh has been repeatedly harassed by the Syrian security authorities because of his human rights work. He was imprisoned from 1980 until 1986 for his work for the Freedom and Human Rights Committee of the Syrian Lawyers' Union. He has been banned from travelling abroad since 2004. He was formerly head of the Human Rights Association in Syria (HRAS), which was established in 2001 by some 40 human rights defenders and lawyers, but which has been denied legal registration, without any reasons being given, by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. The HRAS's appeal against the Ministry's decision has been pending before the Administrative Tribunal (*Majlis al-Dawla*) since 28 July 2002. Meanwhile, HRAS members continue to operate in a legal limbo and face regular harassment and intimidation by the Syrian authorities.

Amnesty International has serious concerns about the fairness of trials before the military court. The court is neither independent nor impartial and its hearings fail to respect the principle of presumption of innocence since in many cases the defendants' guilt appears to have been prejudged. The right of the defendant to attend the trial and to present a defence with or without the assistance of legal representation is often not respected.

Further information on UA: 281/09 Index: MDE 24/030/2009 Issue Date: 05 November 2009

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