

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/032/2006

04 April 2006

Further Information on UA 223/05 (MDE 24/077/2005, 31 August 2005) and follow-ups ((MDE 24/106/2005, 5 December 2005, and MDE 24/018/2005, 6 February 2006) - Fear of torture/Incommunicado detention/Health concern/Unfair trial/Prisoner of conscience

SYRIA Riad Drar al-Hamood (m), aged around 51, Arabic language teacher, active member of the unauthorised Committees for Revival of Civil Society

On 2 April, Riad Drar al-Hamood was sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to five years' imprisonment on charges of belonging to a "secret organisation", "publishing false news" and "inciting sectarian strife".

Riad Drar al-Hamood was arrested on 4 June 2005 after making a speech at the funeral of the prominent Kurdish Islamic scholar, Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi. The Sheikh was abducted in May 2005 and apparently killed several days later after being tortured (see UA 131/05, MDE 24/027/2005, 19 May 2005 and updates). The charge of "inciting sectarian strife" is commonly used against human rights defenders and activists who seek to promote the rights of Syrian Kurds.

Riad Drar al-Hamood has been held in solitary confinement at 'Adra prison, near the capital, Damascus since his arrest. He is apparently receiving monthly visits from his family and has also been allowed visits from his lawyer. He suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure. It is understood that he has been permitted to see a doctor.

He is a member of the Committees for Revival of Civil Society, an unauthorised network of people engaging in human rights-related and political discussion. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his views.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is becoming increasingly concerned at the increase in the targeting of individuals, including human rights defenders, perceived to be in opposition to the Syrian government when exercising the right to freedom of expression (see AI press release *Syria: New Crackdown on Government Opponents*, MDE 24/031/2006, April 2006). Many of those arrested are brought to trial before the SSSC in proceedings which fall far short of international standards for fair trial. For example, defendants are not allowed the right to appeal their sentences, they have very restricted access to their lawyers; and "confessions" allegedly extracted under torture are admissible as evidence. The UN Human Rights Committee has stated that the SSSC's procedures are not compatible with the provisions of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party.

Many thanks to all those who sent appeals on this case. If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- calling on the Syrian authorities for the immediate and unconditional release of Riad Drar al-Hamood, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held purely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- informing them that Amnesty International will continue to call for Riad Drar al-Hamood's release following his sentencing before the SSSC to five years' imprisonment;
- expressing concern that SSSC procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trials;
- reminding the authorities that Riad Drar al-Hamood must not be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while he is custody;
- reminding the authorities that Riad Drar al-Hamood suffers from diabetes and high blood pressure and that he must be given any medical attention that he requires;

- urging the authorities to allow Riad Drar al-Hamood to be taken out of solitary confinement and to mix with other detainees.

APPEALS TO:

President

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

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General Hassan Ali Turkmani
Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 223 7842
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 3327620
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 16 May 2006.