

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO

Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud, a male Syrian political activist, is being held incommunicado at an unknown location. He is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud, aged 44, was arrested from his home in the city of Deir az-Zawr, eastern Syria, by Syrian security forces on 15 November. His family were unable to identify the security force that the arresting officers belonged to.

The authorities have not provided information about where Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud is being held, why he was arrested or whether he will be charged. He had previously been summoned for questioning by Syrian security forces on several occasions, most recently by Political Security earlier this month.

Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud suffers from chronic kidney failure and associated high blood pressure, as well as gout in one of his knees and feet, which causes him pain when walking. His condition requires regular medical supervision and medication.

Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud belongs to the Islamic Democratic Current, an Islamist political group which demands democratic reform in Syria and is opposed to the use of violence. It is part of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), an unauthorized umbrella body comprising opposition groups in Syria. He has acted as a family conciliator at Deir az-Zawr's Shari'a Court and worked as a teacher.

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

- Expressing concern that Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud is being held incommunicado at an unknown location, putting him at particular risk of torture or other ill-treatment;
- 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, and any appropriate medical treatment he may require;
- calling on the authorities to release Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried promptly in proceedings which meet fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 JANUARY 2010 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

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
 Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 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

There are widespread reports of torture and other ill-treatment in Syria's detention and interrogation centers. People suspected of affiliation to unauthorized Islamist groups are at particular risk of arbitrary detention, torture or other ill-treatment. Syrian security force personnel generally benefit from impunity for such violations.

In August 2008, scores of individuals were arrested, mostly in Deir az-Zawr, but also in the cities of Aleppo and Hama. One of those arrested, Mohammed Amin al-Shawa, died in custody in January 2009; according to Syrian human rights organizations, he died as a result of being tortured. At least nine others remain in incommunicado detention at an unknown location. According to Syrian human rights organizations, many appear to have been arrested because the authorities interpreted their appearance and lifestyle as indications of their affiliation to unauthorized Islamist groups.

Freedom of expression and association is strictly controlled in Syria, aided by "state of emergency" laws which have been in force since 1964. Only the Ba'ath Party and some parties linked to it are officially recognized as political parties in Syria and human rights organizations are not authorized to operate. Peaceful critics of the Syrian authorities, members of human rights organizations and others suspected of being political opponents risk arrest, harassment and persecution. One such case that is of 12 individuals serving two-and-a-half-year prison sentences for their involvement in the DDDNC. The 12 were convicted by the Damascus Criminal Court on 29 October 2008 of "weakening national sentiment" and "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which could affect the morale of the country". They were all arrested between 9 December 2007 and 5 February 2008 and initially held incommunicado at the State Security Branch in Damascus, where at least eight of them were beaten. They were punched in the face, kicked and slapped and were forced to sign false "confessions". Amnesty International considers all of them to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. Like Yousef Dheeb al-Hmoud, two of the 12, Dr Yasser al-'Eiti and Ahmad To'meh, belong to the Islamic Democratic Current.

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