

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/036/2008

11 December 2008

UA 339/08 Fear of torture or other ill-treatment/possible prisoners of conscience

SYRIA Sa'dun Sheikhu (m) ] Kurdish political activists  
Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar (m) ]

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Kurdish political activists Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar were arrested on 25 October and have since been held incommunicado. They are in serious danger of torture. Amnesty International believes they may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

The two men are believed to have been detained because of their peaceful activities as senior members of a Kurdish political party, the Kurdish Azadi (Freedom) Party in Syria. Only the ruling Baath Party and parties allied to it are officially allowed to operate in Syria and supporters of unauthorized opposition parties are at constant risk of arrest.

The two men were arrested by Military Security officers, who raided their homes in the north-eastern cities of Ras al-'Ayn and Rameilan. In mid-November their families and associates found out that they were in a detention centre in the north-western city of Aleppo, about 500km from their homes. They are now known to have been moved to the Military Intelligence's Far' Falastin detention centre in Damascus, which is notorious for torture.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Kurds in Syria suffer severe discrimination because of their ethnicity; many of them are denied Syrian nationality and cannot receive the full provision of education, employment, health care and other rights enjoyed by Syrian nationals. Kurdish human rights defenders and civil society activists, and those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups who raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria, are particularly at risk of arbitrary arrest and, in many cases, torture.

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

- calling on the authorities to release Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar immediately unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- expressing concern that Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar are detained incommunicado, putting them at risk of torture;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar 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 allow Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar visits from their families immediately, and also access to a lawyer of their own choosing and any medical attention they may require;
- expressing concern that Sa'dun Sheikhu and Mohammad Sai'd 'Omar may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

**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 Interior

His Excellency Major General Bassam Abdel Majid  
Ministry of Interior  
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 2223428**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 666 2460**  
**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 22 January 2009.