

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical office / Middle East Program
Date: 2 October 2001

***Update on
MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION***

**Deteriorating health of Wajih Ghanim, prisoner of conscience
Syria**

[update on MDE 24/004/2001, 24 April 2001; see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/MDE240042001?OpenDocument&of=COUNTRIES\SYRIA>]

Key words lack of medical care / ill-health / prisoner of conscience

Amnesty International's concerns

Amnesty International remains seriously concerned for the health of prisoner of conscience Wajih Ghanim and is renewing its call for appeals on his behalf. Wajih Ghanim reportedly is not able to walk and is bed bound as a result of complications arising from torture in the early 1990s. He has a number of medical and psychological problems and is reportedly unwilling to receive visitors or communicate with his fellow prisoners. He is being held at Sednaya Prison on the outskirts of the capital Damascus.

Wajih Ghanim was reportedly tortured using electric shocks and the "German chair" (a metal chair with moving parts, which stretches the spine and causes severe pressure on the victim's neck and limbs). He is said to be suffering from degeneration of the vertebrae, chronic headaches, hypertension, a urinary tract infection and stomach problems. His psychological condition has been steadily deteriorating since November 2000, when all but nine of his fellow prisoners of conscience from the Party for Communist Action (PCA) were released following a Presidential amnesty.

Wajih Ghanim is a former government employee, married and has one child. He was arrested in August 1987. He was charged with affiliation to the PCA, and "opposing the objectives of the Revolution". He was reportedly tortured and ill-treated while being interrogated by the Syrian security forces following his arrest, apparently in an attempt to extract information about the PCA and its membership. In the early 1990s, he was again reportedly tortured using electric shocks and the "German Chair", in Tadmur and Sednaya Prisons. He reportedly suffered from internal bleeding and a paralysed arm and had to be hospitalized. In 1994, he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment with hard labour following an unfair trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC).

Recommended actions

Please write letters in English, Arabic or your own language. Please use professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession,

seeking information about the diagnosis and current health of Wajih Ghanim, imprisoned in Sednaya prison;
asking for him to be urgently provided with specialist medical care in accordance with international human rights standards including Article 22 of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;
calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please do not be discouraged by the possible lack of replies to your letters. They are noticed. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 2 December 2001, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

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and to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.