

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/046/2004

21 June 2004

**Further Information on UA 185/03 (MDE 24/020/2003, 24 June 2003) and follow-up (MDE 24/026/2003, 23 July 2003; MDE 24/039/2003, 05 November 2003; and MDE 24/022/04, 18 March 2004) - Prisoner of conscience/legal concern/torture and other ill-treatment**

**SYRIA**

**'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri (m), aged 32**

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'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri was sentenced to three years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 20 June, on charges of "disseminating false information". The sentence was immediately reduced to two and a half years.

The charges relate to his e-mailing articles which were mainly from the *Akhbar al-Sharq* internet site, [www.thisissyria.net](http://www.thisissyria.net). The Syrian authorities consider material on the site to be "detrimental to the reputation and security of the nation" and "full of ideas and views opposed to the system of government in Syria".

'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri was arrested on 23 February. Since then he has apparently been held incommunicado. He was reportedly beaten in custody before he was moved to Sednaya prison, on the outskirts of Damascus, where he is now held. His lawyers were not allowed to see all the court documents relating to the case, although they made repeated requests.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri is one of several people detained in Syria for exercising their right to freedom of expression through the internet. Muhannad Qutaysh, his brother Haytham, and Yahia al-Aws are held in Sednaya prison on similar grounds. They were arrested over 18 months ago, reportedly for sending articles to an electronic newspaper in the United Arab Emirates. Muhannad Qutaysh and Yahia al-Aws are charged with "receiving secret information on behalf of a foreign state which threatens the security of Syria", and "publishing false news outside of Syria": they had reportedly been writing articles, under pseudonyms, about government corruption, politics, economics and human rights issues in Syria. Haytham and Muhannad Qutaysh are both charged with "encouraging the transfer of secret information"; and Haythem Qutaysh is also charged with "writing which threatens the security of Syria and her relations with foreign states".

A fifth man, student, Mas'oud Hamid, is imprisoned for reported "unlawful" use of the Internet. He was arrested on 24 July 2003 while sitting an exam at Damascus University. It is believed that he is being held incommunicado in solitary confinement at 'Adra Prison, near Damascus. It seems he has been detained because he allegedly posted photos of a peaceful Kurdish demonstration in Damascus, during which seven Kurds were arrested, on the Internet site [www.amude.com](http://www.amude.com). The seven Kurds remain in prison.

**Many thanks to all who sent appeals. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the case, and will be campaigning through other means on the issue of freedom of expression in Syria. If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English or your own language:**

- calling for the 'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri to be released immediately and unconditionally, since he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for exercising his legitimate right to freedom of expression;
- expressing concern about 'Abdel Rahman al-Shaghouri's trial before the SSSC, noting that this court falls far short of international standards for fair trial proceedings;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that he will not be tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- calling on the authorities to give him immediate access to his family and his lawyers.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad  
President of the Republic  
Presidential Palace  
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegram:**     **President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax:**            **+ 963 11 332 3410**  
**Telex:**         **419160 prespl sy**  
**Salutation:**   **Your Excellency**

His Excellency Major General Ali Hammud  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of Interior  
Merjeh Circle  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegram:**     **Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Fax:**            **+ 963 11 222 3428**  
**Telex:**         **411016 AFIRS SY**  
**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 2 August 2004