

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: MDE 24/051/2006**

**24 July 2006**

**Further Information on UA 142/06 (MDE 24/039/2006, 19 May 2006) and follow-up (MDE 24/040/2006, 31 May 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience**

**SYRIA**                      **Anwar al-Bunni (m), lawyer and human rights defender**  
**Michel Kilo (m), writer**  
**Khalil Hussein (m), former prisoner of conscience**  
**Mahmoud 'Issa (m), former prisoner of conscience**  
**Suleyman Shummar (m)**  
**Muhammad Mahfouz (m)**

**Released:**                      **Nidal Darwish (m), human rights defender**  
**Mahmoud Mer'i (m), human rights defender**  
**Dr Safwan Tayfour (m), medical doctor**  
**Ghaleb 'Amer (m), human rights defender**

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Mahmoud Mer'i, Ghaleb 'Amer, Dr Safwan Tayfour and Nidal Darwish were freed on 17 July, on payment of 1,000 Syrian Lira (US\$20) bail. This follows their withdrawing their signatures from the "Beirut-Damascus Declaration", a document signed by hundreds of Syrian and Lebanese nationals, calling upon their two governments to normalise relations by exchanging ambassadors and defining their shared borders. The four men are still facing trial, although it is expected that all charges against them will be dropped.

The four reportedly withdrew their signatures after requesting a re-investigation into their case. They allegedly told an investigating judge on 13 July that the draft declaration that they signed differed to the one that had been published in the media. They also reportedly told the judge that they were surprised to see their names included alongside those of Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals who were arrested for signing the declaration and distanced themselves from the published declaration. Amnesty International has not yet been able to verify whether these claims about the "Beirut-Damascus Declaration" were made as a result of coercion. Nidal Darwish is known to have been beaten during interrogation. However, in a statement published after their release, the four denied being coerced into withdrawing their names.

The remaining six detainees continue to be held incommunicado and are at risk of torture. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression. The lengthy bureaucratic process their lawyers have to go through in order to meet with the men has limited the detainees' access to legal representation.

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

- welcoming the release of Mahmoud Mer'i, Ghaleb 'Amer, Dr Safwan Tayfour and Nidal Darwish, while expressing concern that at least one of the four was beaten during interrogation.
- calling on the authorities to release the remaining six men (naming them) immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for their peaceful work in promotion of democracy and human rights;
- expressing concern at reports that at least one of the remaining detainees, Anwar al-Bunni, has been beaten during interrogation and that the remaining six are still held incommunicado, putting them at grave risk of torture;
- reminding the authorities that the six men must be given unfettered access to lawyers of their own choosing, their families and any medical attention they may require.

**APPEALS TO:**

*(Please note that it may be difficult to get through to the fax numbers; please keep trying)*

President  
His Excellency Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
al-Rashid Street  
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**Fax: + 963 11 332 3410**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Defence  
His Excellency General  
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His Excellency Walid Mu'allim  
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**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 4 September 2006.