PUBLIC AI Index: MDE 24/057/2006

2 October 2006

Further Information on 142/06 (MDE 24/039/2006, 19 May 2006) and follow-up (MDE 24/040/2006, 31 May 2006; MDE 24/051/2006, 24 July 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience/unfair trial

SYRIA Anwar al-Bunni (m) lawyer and human rights defender

Michele Kilo (m) writer

Recent releases: Khalil Hussein (m) former prisoner of conscience

Mahmoud 'Issa (m) former prisoner of conscience

Suleyman Shummar (m) Muhammad Mahfouz (m)

Released on 17 July 2006: 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

Prisoners of conscience, Khalil Hussein, Mahmoud 'Issa, Suleyman Shummar and Muhammad Mahfouz were released on bail of 1,000 Syrian Lira (US \$20) from 'Adra prison on 25 September 2006. They may still face charges in connection with their signing of the so-called Beirut-Damascus Declaration of 12 May 2006.

Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo (who have been held since 14 May) remain held in 'Adra prison, near the capital, Damascus. They are reportedly being held on charges including "weakening nationalist feelings and inciting racial or sectarian strife". There is no date as yet for their trial nor which court will hear their case. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, after they signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration calling for normalisation of Syrian and Lebanese diplomatic relations.

Reportedly, Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo have recently been denied visits from their lawyers and family, although visits from their lawyers apparently resumed some 10 days ago.

On 29 September Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo reportedly ended a three day hunger strike that they began in support of another prisoner of conscience, Muhammad al-'Abdullah. Muhammad al-'Abdullah began a hunger strike on 22 September to protest the judiciary's refusal to release him so that he can sit exams beginning in October. Other Syrian detainees held for their work in support of human rights and democratic reform – 'Ali al-'Abdullah, Muhammad al-'Abdullah, Kamal al-Labwani and Fateh Muhammad Jamus – were also said to have joined the protest. (For more on the case of Muhammad al-'Abdullah see UA73/06, MDE 24/028/2006 and updates). More information about the aforementioned prisoners of conscience is available at http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-syr/index.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Between 14 and 18 May 2006, ten Syrian civil society activists were arrested by State Security service officers. At least two of them, Anwar al-Bunni and Nidal Darwish, were said to have been beaten during interrogation while held in incommunicado detention. They were among several hundred Syrian and Lebanese nationals who signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration. On 17 July 2006 four others, Nidal Darwish, Mahmoud Mer'i, Dr Safwan Tayfour and Ghaleb 'Amer, were also released on bail of 1,000 Syrian Lira.

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

- welcoming the release of Khalil Hussein, Mahmoud 'Issa, Suleyman Shummar and Muhammad Mahfouz, while expressing concern that they appear to have been detained purely for peacefully exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo who are prisoners of conscience, held solely for their peaceful work in promoting democracy and human rights;
- calling for the charges against all those arrested in connection with the signing of the Beirut-Damascus Declaration to be dropped:
- seeking assurances that Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo will be well-treated, and not tortured or ill-treated, while in custody;
- reminding the authorities that both men have the right to immediate and unrestricted access to their family, a lawyer, and any medical treatment they may need;
- urging the authorities to adhere to Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution which guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens, and reminding them that in detaining Anwar al-Bunni and Michele Kilo, they are breaching their obligations under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which affirms the right to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19).

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 Damascus Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410 Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General Hassan Ali Turkmani Ministry of Defence Omayyad Square Damascus Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: +963 11 223 7842 Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs
His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
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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 12 November.