

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/059/2006

03 October 2006

Further Information on UA 41/06 (MDE 24/019/2006, 17 February 2006) and follow-ups (MDE 24/020/2006, 21 February 2006; MDE 24/023/2006, 7 March 2006; MDE 24/029/2006, 31 March 2006; MDE 24/036/2006, 11 May 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience

SYRIA

'Ali Nizar 'Ali (m), aged 21, student
Husam 'Ali Mulhim (m), aged 21, student
Tarek Ghorani (m), student
Maher Ibrahim (m), aged around 25, shop owner
Ayham Saqr (m), aged around 30, works in a beauty salon
'Alam Fakhour (m), aged around 26
'Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged around 21, student
Diab Sirieyeh (m), aged around 26, part-time student

The eight men named above were apparently scheduled to appear before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 26 September. However, they were not brought to the court and their trial was said to have been postponed until 26 November. They continue to be held incommunicado, reportedly in Sednaya prison, on the outskirts of Damascus. They have had no access to the outside world since their arrests, which took place between 26 January and 18 March 2006. They are in grave danger of being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, and there are serious concerns for their safety.

Trials before the notorious SSSC are known to fall far short of international standards for fair trial. For example, defendants have no right of appeal, they are given only restricted access to their lawyers and "confessions" allegedly extracted under torture are admissible as evidence. The practice of torture and other ill-treatment is systematic in Syria.

All eight men were arrested and initially detained by the Air Force Intelligence Branch in the town of Harasta, near Damascus. The nature of the charges against the men is not known but they appear to be held in connection with their peaceful, pro-democracy activities. They were reportedly involved in developing a youth movement and in writing political articles for various websites. Amnesty International considers the eight men to be prisoners of conscience held only for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Syrian civil society activists and human rights defenders are continually targeted for arrest by the Syrian authorities and are often held in prolonged detention. One of the eight men, Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah, is the son of 'Ali al-'Abdullah and the brother of Muhammad 'Ali al-'Abdullah, also held as prisoners of conscience for their legitimate work in defence of human rights (see UA 73/06, MDE 24/028/2006, 31 March 2006, and follow-ups). For more information on this and other similar cases visit the AI website: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-syr/index>.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all eight men (name them), as they are prisoners of conscience held solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- expressing concern that the men have been held in incommunicado detention for a prolonged period;
- reminding the authorities that denying detainees access to visits from a lawyer or relatives violates basic human rights and has long been recognized as a contributory factor facilitating torture and other ill-treatment;

- seeking urgent assurances that each of the eight young men are not being tortured or ill-treated while they are in custody;
- reminding the authorities that the men have the right to immediate and unrestricted access to their families and lawyers, and any medical treatment they may need;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against the eight men before the SSSC must comply with international standards for fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

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

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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 14 November 2006.