

PUBLIC

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UA 268/06 Prisoner of conscience/medical concern

SYRIA 'Aref Dalilah (m), aged around 63, former dean of the faculty of economics of Aleppo University

Amnesty International is gravely concerned about the deteriorating health of prisoner of conscience, 'Aref Dalilah. According to reports, he recently suffered a stroke and is now completely numb down the left side of his body, and his left hand and foot are swollen. 'Aref Dalilah is demanding access to medical care independent of the prison authorities, which the authorities have apparently repeatedly refused to provide in the past.

'Aref Dalilah was reportedly given a brain scan, but there is no information available as to the results. He has suffered from ill-health for much of his imprisonment since September 2001. In April 2002, he suffered from deep vein thrombosis (a blood clot within a deep vein which can either partially or completely impede blood flow in the vein. It has potentially serious consequences such as a fatal pulmonary embolism or blood clot in the lung). Although it left him in urgent need of appropriate medication and specialist medical care, he was apparently returned to prison before receiving either. He also suffers from diabetes, high blood pressure and an irregular heartbeat.

He has apparently been held in solitary confinement for three years, which is likely to have had a detrimental effect on his physical and mental health. He is being held in a small cell which does not allow him the opportunity for physical exercise.

'Aref Dalilah was arrested in September 2001 after having taken part in a political seminar earlier that month in the house of parliamentarian and former prisoner of conscience, Riad Seif (see UA 226/01, MDE 24/029/2001 and updates). He is the longest serving prisoner of several pro-democracy civil society activists arrested and given custodial sentences purely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. They were active during the so-called "Damascus Spring", a period following the President Bashar al-Assad's inauguration speech where he indicated an intention to increase tolerance for free speech and to allow political reforms. There followed the establishment of a number of forums where public affairs, political reforms and cultural issues were discussed which concluded with the authorities' clamp down on this new freedom of expression in early 2001. By the summer of that year many of the people who had taken part in these forums were arrested and sentenced to prison terms for exercising their right to freedom of expression (see AI report *Syria: Smothering freedom of expression: the detention of peaceful critics*, MDE 24/007/2002, June 2002 at: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE240072002?open&of=ENG-SYR>). 'Aref Dalilah was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial, on charges of "attempting to change the constitution by illegal means".

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 'Aref Dalilah, as he is a prisoner of conscience, held only for the peaceful expression of his legitimate beliefs;
- expressing your belief that his case is especially compelling given his ill-health, which is likely to be exacerbated by his continuing imprisonment;
- urging the authorities to allow 'Aref Dalilah his request to seek alternative and independent medical treatment;
- calling on the authorities to end 'Aref Dalilah's solitary confinement, as the conditions in which he is held amount to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, and are likely to exacerbate his ill-health.

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
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 7620
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Health

His Excellency Maher al-Husami
Minister of Health
Majlis ash-Sha'b
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax : +963 11 3311114
Email: health-min@net.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 15 November 2006.