

PUBLIC

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17 October 2006**

Further Information on UA 113/06 (MDE 24/034/2006, 3 May 2006) Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoner of conscience

SYRIA

Fateh Muhammad Jamus (m), aged 57, human rights defender

Prisoner of conscience Fateh Jamus was released from 'Adra prison, near the Syrian capital, Damascus, on 12 October. He was released by the Court of First Instance on bail of 500 Syrian Lira (around \$US2).

Fateh Jamus still reportedly faces the charge under Article 287 of the Syrian Penal Code which states that "[a]ny Syrian broadcasting abroad false or exaggerated news that would damage the reputation of the state or its financial standing is punishable by imprisonment for at least six months and a fine between 50 and 500 Syrian Lira." Amnesty International believes that the charge against him should be immediately dropped, since it appears to be based purely on the peaceful expression of his legitimately held beliefs and as a result of his work carried out in defence of human rights.

According to Amnesty International's information, several other charges originally brought against Fateh Jamus by the Public Prosecutor's Office have now been dropped, apparently on grounds of insufficient evidence. They include charges related to joining a political or international group without the government's permission; causing "civil war or ethnic warfare by arming Syrians or encouraging them to carry arms against each other", and "heading an armed group, or holding a position of leadership" in an armed group "with the aim of attacking a town or village or any government property, or property belonging to citizens".

His case will reportedly be heard on 21 December 2006. It is not yet known which court will hear his case. The Court of First Instance will allocate the case to the relevant court in the coming weeks.

Until his release, Fateh Jamus was held as a prisoner of conscience for almost six months. During his detention, he was apparently held with criminal prisoners, and was reportedly beaten and slapped by one of them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fateh Jamus is a human rights defender who was arrested on 1 May 2006 by officers of Syrian State Security when he arrived at Damascus airport after a trip to Europe, during which he addressed an Amnesty International conference in Sweden on human rights and asylum issues. He also met the Swedish Parliamentary Human Rights Group and appeared while in the UK on a radio programme promoting Arab-Kurdish dialogue and peaceful reform in Syria.

Fateh Jamus has been subject to harassment for his beliefs over many years. In 1982 he was arrested and later tried in connection with membership of the Party for Communist Action (PCA), in an unfair trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). He was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in January 1994 but was held for three years beyond the expiry of his sentence until 2000. On 23 August 2003, he was one of 14 people arrested while attending a lecture marking the 40th anniversary of the declaration of the state of emergency in Syria. He was charged with "affiliation to a secret organization and carrying out acts which could incite factional conflict within the nation". He was sentenced to one year in prison, but the charges against him were dropped in the presidential amnesty of the same year and he was released.

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

- welcoming the news that Fateh Jamus has been released;
- calling for all charges against Fateh Jamus to be immediately and unconditionally dropped, since they appear to result from the peaceful expression of his legitimately held beliefs and as a result of his work carried out in defence of human rights.

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

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Minister of Defence

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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 28 November 2006.*****