

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/069/2006

21 November 2006

Further Information on UA 140/05 (MDE 24/033/2005, 25 May 2005) and follow-ups (MDE 24/037/2005, 3 June 2005; MDE 24/043/2005, 20 June 2005; MDE 24/049/2005, 14 July 2005; MDE 24/074/2005, 18 August 2005; MDE 24/100/2005, 9 November 2005) Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/legal concern/medical concern

SYRIA **Nizar Ristnawi, engineer and founding member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights-Syria (AOHR-S)**

On 19 November, Nizar Ristnawi was sentenced before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to four years' imprisonment for "spreading false news" and "insulting the President". Trials before the SSSC fall far short of international standards for fair trials. The charges and sentencing appear to be based on Nizar Ristnawi's work in promotion of human rights.

Nizar Ristnawi was arrested on 18 April 2005 and detained incommunicado and at an unknown location for two weeks before the authorities reportedly told his family that he was in their custody. He continued to be held incommunicado until August 2005, when he was permitted monthly visits from his wife.

Muhammad Ra'dun, former head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights-Syria (AOHR-S), was released on 3 November 2005 following a presidential amnesty. He had been arrested on 22 May 2005 in connection with statements made by the organization on human rights in Syria.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has longstanding concerns that proceedings before the SSSC fail to meet international standards for fair trial. Defendants have restricted access to lawyers; "confessions" are admissible as evidence even when they are alleged to have been extracted under torture; allegations of torture are not investigated by the court; judges have wide discretion in sentencing, and convicted prisoners cannot appeal against sentences. In July 2005, the UN Human Rights Committee reiterated its concerns about the conduct of the SSSC and concluded that Syria "should take urgent measures to ensure that all rights and guarantees provided under article 14 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights] ... are respected in the composition, functions and procedures of the ... Court and in particular that accused persons [should be] granted the right to appeal against decisions of the Court."

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

- expressing concern that Nizar Ristnawi has been sentenced to four years' imprisonment after an unfair trial, on account of his legitimate work on defence of human rights;
- calling for the release of Nizar Ristnawi as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Acting Minister of Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax **+ 963 11 222 3428**
Salutation: **Your Excellency**

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: **+ 963 11 666 2460**
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 2 January 2007.