

Further Information on UA 142/06 (MDE 24/039/2006, 19 May 2006) and follow-ups (MDE 24/040/2006, 31 May 2006; MDE 24/051/2006, 24 July 2006; MDE 24/057/2006, 2 October 2006; MDE 24/065/2006, 25 October 2006; MDE 24/066/2006, 27 October 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience/unfair trial

SYRIA **Anwar al-Bunni (m), lawyer and human rights defender**
Michel Kilo (m), writer
Mahmoud 'Issa (m), former prisoner of conscience
Khalil Hussein (m), former prisoner of conscience
Suleyman Shummar (m)

Mahmoud 'Issa and Michel Kilo were brought before the Criminal Court in Damascus on 31 October to face new charges brought against them that month. They appealed against the new charges, and the case was adjourned. The Court of Appeal has rejected their appeal, and a new trial date will be set in January.

The new charges include inciting racial, religious or sectarian conflict; insulting official institutions and public officials; attempting to weaken national sentiment, damage the reputation of the State and expose Syria to the danger of aggression. Michel Kilo is also charged with joining an international group without government permission; and joining an organisation formed for the purpose of changing the basic structures of the State.

Michel Kilo was ordered to be released on 19 October 2006 by a Referral Judge following the decision of an Investigating Judge, that all charges against him should be dropped, except for the accusation that he circulated information, during a period of "anticipation of war", which "weakens nationalist feelings and incites racial or sectarian strife". His release order appears to have been obstructed when the Public Prosecutor filed further charges against him. A different Investigating Judge confirmed the new charges, preventing him being released.

Khalil Hussein and Suleyman Shummar, who were released on 25 September, are believed to be still in imminent danger of arrest on the same or similar charges as Michel Kilo and Mahmoud Issa.

Anwar al-Bunni appeared before the Criminal Court on 19 December on charges of disseminating false information deemed to be harmful to the state, and forming an international group without government permission. It appears that the latter charge refers to his brief time as Director of an EU-funded NGO established to carry out human rights training in Syria. The authorities closed it down in March 2006. It had apparently been set up in collaboration with the Syrian government.

All five men were arrested in connection with their signing of the Beirut-Damascus Declaration, which called for Syria and Lebanon to normalise diplomatic relations. They are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of their beliefs.

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

- calling on the authorities to drop all charges against the five men (naming them), since they appear to be based solely on the men's peaceful exercise of their right to express their beliefs;
- reminding them that each of the five men must be given a fair hearing in accordance with international standards for fair trial, including the right to a hearing by an "independent and impartial tribunal" in accordance with the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a state party;
- urging the authorities to ensure that none of the three men in custody are tortured or ill-treated;
- urging them to implement measures laid out in the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which allow for "the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels".

APPEALS TO: (Fax numbers may be difficult to get through to; please keep trying)

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad

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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 8 December 2006.*****