

URGENT ACTION

FEMALE POLITICAL PRISONER ON HUNGER STRIKE

A Syrian female political prisoner, Tuhama Mahmoud Ma'rouf, currently serving a six-year prison term for her membership of the unauthorized Party for Communist Action, has been on hunger strike since 18 February. Amnesty International believes that she is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association.

Tuhama Ma'rouf was arrested by members of Criminal Security at her home in the city of Aleppo, northern Syria, on 6 February 2010. The arrest was on the basis of a warrant issued shortly after she was sentenced in her absence to six years' imprisonment by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 5 November 1995. She had been convicted of "joining a secret organization", a reference to her membership of the Party for Communist Action. Amnesty International does not know why the Syrian authorities did not seek to arrest Tuhama Ma'rouf until over 15 years after her sentence.

According to Syrian human rights organizations, Tuhama Ma'rouf spent the first three days of her detention in Aleppo's Criminal Security branch, where her family was allowed to visit her. On 9 February 2010 she was brought before the SSSC's General Prosecutor, who ordered her transfer to a Political Security branch in Damascus. She was transferred immediately to the political wing of 'Adra prison (officially known as Damascus Central Prison) and held there incommunicado for nearly a month and a half. She remains detained in 'Adra prison but has since been allowed regular visits from her family.

In 2007 Tuhama Ma'rouf's lawyer reportedly submitted a request to the General Prosecutor of the SSSC asking him to drop the sentence against her, on the basis that, according to the lawyer's understanding of Syrian law, a sentence of six years in prison should expire if not implemented within 12 years. The prosecutor rejected the request, but Amnesty International is not aware on what basis. In the same year Tuhama Ma'rouf sent letters to the President and Minister of Interior to the same effect, but has apparently not received a response from either.

Amnesty International understands that Tuhama Ma'rouf is staging a hunger strike to demand her transfer to Douma Women's Prison near Damascus. She sent a letter to the Minister of Interior on 26 February 2011 urging him to authorize such a move. As far as Amnesty International is aware, she is yet to receive a response to the request.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, French, Arabic or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Tuhama Mahmoud Ma'rouf as she is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression and association.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 APRIL 2011 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Major Sa'id Mohamed Samour
 Ministry of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 214 6251
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freedoms of expression and association are strictly controlled in Syria, aided by “state of emergency” laws which have been in force since 1964. Only the Ba’ath Party and some parties linked to it are officially recognized as political parties in Syria and human rights organizations are not authorized to operate. Human rights defenders, government critics and advocates of political reform face constant harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the Syrian authorities cracked down on members of the then active unauthorized Party for Communist Action (PCA), arresting hundreds of them; many were tried before the SSSC and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Tuhama Ma’rouf was arrested and detained in 1992 as part of that campaign but released on bail one year later. She reportedly attended all of the sessions of her trial before the SSSC, except for the final hearing when the verdict was handed down. According to Tuhama Ma’rouf’s lawyer she is entitled to benefit of the provisions of limitations as she was sentenced around 15 years ago.

The PCA was founded in 1976 under another name which it changed to the PCA in 1980. Advocating only non-violent methods for political change, it was effectively crushed after the crackdown against it. It is unclear what membership if any the party retains or whether any activities are carried out in its name today.

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