

# URGENT ACTION

## ACTIVIST DETAINED, RISKS TORTURE

**Syrian political activist George Sabra has been detained incommunicado at an unknown location since 20 July as part of mass arrests by the Syrian army and security forces in the town of Qatana, south-west of the capital, Damascus. He is at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment.**

Tanks and armed men moved into Qatana, south-west of the capital, on 16 July, opening fire on unarmed residents and carrying out raids, randomly arresting dozens of men between the ages of 18 and 40. Political activist **George Sabra**, aged 64, is among those held incommunicado at unknown locations. Amnesty International is particularly concerned for his safety given reports of widespread torture across Syria.

George Sabra's son, Chadi Sabra, who lives in exile in France, told Amnesty International that a number of armed men in plain clothes arrested his father at the family's flat at 1am on 20 July without allowing him to change out of his pyjamas or take his ID card. Ten minutes later another group of armed men arrived at the flat and confiscated his personal computer and mobile phone after introducing themselves as members of the security forces. They also took some of his clothes and his ID card.

The Syrian authorities have not revealed why he was arrested. According to Chadi Sabra, however, his father's arrest is likely to be related to the senior position he holds within the unauthorized Democratic People's Party in Syria and his publicly expressed support for peaceful protests and refusal to engage in dialogue with the authorities unless the security forces refrain from further violence against peaceful protesters.

Amnesty International believes that George Sabra is probably a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for legitimately exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association.

### **Please write immediately in Arabic, English, French or your own language:**

- Expressing concern that George Sabra has been held incommunicado at an unknown location since 20 July, and calling on the authorities to ensure that he is fully protected against torture or other ill-treatment;
- Expressing concern that George Sabra is held for supporting the protests in Qatana and noting that, if this is the case, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association and call for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Urging the Syrian authorities to take immediate steps to name and disclose the whereabouts of all detainees arrested in connection with ongoing protests, to give them immediate access to lawyers of their choosing and their families and any medical treatment they may require, and to safeguard them from torture and other ill-treatment.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 AUGUST 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 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  
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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Pro-reform protests had been taking place daily in Qatana from 9 to 15 July, following four months of unrest across Syria. The protesters clashed with supporters of President Bashar al-Assad on a number of occasions when both sides threw stones at each other.

According to Qatana residents the situation escalated when the Syrian army and security forces entered the town with tanks early on 16 July and opened fire on residential areas, injuring a number of people including some of those who were leaving the Mosque of Mariam Ben 'Omran after Saturday morning prayers. A curfew was imposed at around 11am, internet, electricity and water were cut off in at least some parts of the town and the army and security forces began carrying out door-to-door raids and arresting men.

Qatana residents also reported that a seven-month-old child, Mohammed Ahmed Sabboura, was shot dead and his mother injured while attempting to flee Qatana.

George Sabra was imprisoned twice before for his peaceful activities as a senior member of the Democratic People's Party, previously called the Syrian Communist Party – Political Bureau, most recently for a month, between 10 April and 10 May 2011, when he was released on bail, and previously for eight years between 1987 and 1995, during which time he was convicted in a grossly unfair trial before the Supreme State Security Court. He spent the first three years of that period of detention at the State Security branch in Damascus where he was not allowed visits from his family or lawyer. He was later transferred to Saydnaya Military Prison, near Damascus, where he spent the remaining five years and was allowed family visits.

As part of his leading role within the Democratic People's Party, George Sabra is the party's representative in the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), an unauthorized umbrella body of opposition groups that calls for democratic reform and greater respect for human rights in Syria.

Name: George Sabra

Gender m/f: m

UA: 224/11 Index: MDE 24/036/2011 Issue Date: 20 July 2011

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