

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN ACTIVISTS HELD INCOMMUNICADO AT RISK

Syrian activists, brothers Yahya Shurbaji and Ma'an Shurbaji, Ghayath Mattar, Mohamed Tayseer Khouhani and Mazen Zyadeh, all from Daraya, a south-western suburb of Damascus, were arrested on 6 September and are being held incommunicado, reportedly by Air Force Intelligence. They are at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Yahya Shurbaji, aged 32, was arrested on 6 September from his car by a group of plain-clothed men believed to be members of the Syrian security forces while he was on his way to meet his brother, **Ma'an Shurbaji**. A source told Amnesty International that Yahya Shurbaji received a call from his brother prior to his arrest, during which Ma'an Shurbaji claimed he was injured during a raid on his house by security forces and asked for help. Amnesty International's contacts say that Ma'an Shurbaji was in fact in the custody of the security forces when he made the call and was forced to do so to facilitate his brother's arrest. Ma'an Shurbaji remains in custody, but it is unclear whether he is injured or not. Two other activists, **Mazen Zyadeh** and **Mohamed Tayseer Khouhani**, were arrested at the same time as Ma'an Shurbaji and one other, **Ghayath Mattar**, at the same time as Yahya Shurbaji.

There is no further information on the whereabouts of Yahya Shurbaji, Ma'an Shurbaji, Mazen Zyadeh, Mohamed Tayseer Khouhani or Ghayath Mattar. However, contacts believe that they may all be held at the Air Force Intelligence branch in Daraya, following a phone call to a family member from an Air Force Intelligence officer claiming the men were in his custody. All men are at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment and there are fears for their wellbeing following information from a contact that, prior to their arrest, security forces allegedly told family members they would kill one of the men.

No charges are known to have been brought against the men but Amnesty International believes that they are likely to have been detained solely for their peaceful involvement in pro-reform protests. Yahya Shurbaji in particular has played an active role in peaceful anti-regime demonstrations in Daraya since March.

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

- Express concern that Yahya and Ma'an Shurbaji, Mazen Zyadeh, Mohamed Tayseer Khouhani and Ghayath Mattar have been held incommunicado since 6 September, putting them at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment, and ask for their whereabouts and legal status to be disclosed immediately;
- Express concern that all five men are being held solely for their peaceful involvement in pro-reform protests, in which case they would be prisoners of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that all five men are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with their families and a lawyer of their choice, and provided with any medical attention they require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 OCTOBER 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 insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the beginning of the popular protests in mid-March, the Syrian security forces have arrested thousands of people and activists across the country. Amnesty International has received numerous accounts of detainees being tortured or otherwise ill-treated as well as reports of at least 88 deaths in custody, in many cases as an apparent result of such abuses.

According to human rights activists, Air Force Intelligence oversees arrests in Daraya. Along with the other Syrian intelligence services, it regularly detains people suspected of opposing the government and holds them incommunicado for lengthy periods in detention centres that are notorious for torture and other ill-treatment.

Activists from Daraya have told Amnesty International that all of those involved in organizing protests there went into hiding soon after the outbreak of the popular protests in mid-March, and only go out in public to take part in the protests. They include Yahya Shurbaji, who went into hiding in April following repeated raids on his house by security forces. For further information on the arrests of other activists from Daraya, please see *Urgent Action: Protesters at risk of torture after arrest* (Index: MDE 24/041/2011).

Yahya Shurbaji was first arrested in May 2003 for participating in a silent march against the US-led invasion of Iraq that year. On 1 April 2004, he was sentenced by a Field Military Court to four years in prison for “attempting to establish a religious organization, involvement in unlicensed social activities and attending unlicensed religious and intellectual classes”. During his detention in Saydnaya prison, Yahya Shurbaji was reportedly subjected to various forms of torture and other ill-treatment, including beatings and sleep deprivation until his release in October 2005. Since then he has apparently been banned from travelling outside of Syria.

Yahya Shurbaji has played a prominent role in peaceful activism since anti-regime demonstrations began in Syria in March 2011 and has been described by other Syrian activists as the creator of the “rose initiative”, which saw protesters in the suburbs of Damascus confronting security forces by holding roses and offering them water during demonstrations. He told Amnesty International on 17 August: “All organizers of the protests are in hiding since the start of the mass arrests in April. We only appear during the demonstrations and other activities; then we must return to our hiding places”. Yahya Shurbaji participated in the demonstration calling for the release of prisoners of conscience before the Ministry of Interior on 16 March. He has worked closely with the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs), a network of local committees responsible for planning and organizing protests and related activities.

Name: Yahya Shurbaji, Ma'an Shurbaji, Ghayath Mattar, Mohamed Tayseer Khouli and Mazen Zyadeh
Gender m/f: All male

UA: 268/11 Index: MDE 24/050/2011 Issue Date: 8 September 2011