

URGENT ACTION

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE OF BUSINESSMAN

Syrian businessman Amjad Kassem has not been seen since 21 May. He was last heard from at around 2pm that day when he called his mother to tell her he was being taken by members of the security forces to a branch of the Syrian State Security. Amnesty International fears that he has been subjected to enforced disappearance.

According to a relative who lives overseas, **Amjad Kassem** was telephoned on 21 May by someone believed to be a member of the Syrian security forces, who asked him to visit one of their branches in Damascus. Amjad Kassem went to the branch with his driver, apparently because he thought this visit would be in relation to the lifting of his travel ban which he had been informed of in April 2012. After spending some time at the branch, he told his driver to return home, as he had been told he would have to visit a different branch, in Baghdad Street, and he expected the process to take some time. He called his mother at around 2pm to tell her he was on the way to the branch in Baghdad Street with members of the security forces "to finish off some paperwork".

His family have not heard from him since, and believe he was detained there. Some of them went to the branch the following day to ask about him but were told he was not there. However, the family have been informed by unofficial sources that he is indeed being held there.

Amjad Kassem had been arrested previously when he went to a State Security branch on 2 April to ask about his travel ban. He was released on bail on 11 April after being charged with an offence related to inciting people to close their shops to attend demonstrations. His family believe these charges are unfounded as he himself did not attend demonstrations or close his own business.

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

- Expressing concern that Amjad Kassem appears to have been subjected to enforced disappearance and calling on the Syrian authorities to inform his family of his whereabouts and legal status immediately;
- Calling on them to release him immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and allowed contact with his family, a lawyer of his choice and any necessary medical treatment without delay.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 JULY 2012 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street
Damascus,
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
Ibrahim al-Shaar, Ministry of Interior,
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 211 9578 (keep trying)

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 6253 (keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country, as below:

Name [Address 1](#)~~Address~~ Fax Fax number Email Email address

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

Amjad Kassem was on his way to travel to Dubai in his capacity as an IT business-owner on 1 April when he was first told about his travel ban, which apparently came into force in March 2012. His passport was confiscated at the airport and he was asked to visit a branch of the security forces in Damascus to obtain a "passport release form". He went to the branch on 2 April and was not heard from again until he appeared before a criminal court on 11 April. His family had asked the authorities about him repeatedly, but were given no information about his health, whereabouts or the charges against him. They were able to find out through unofficial channels that he was being held at one of the State Security branches in Damascus. He did not have access to a lawyer during his detention. Following his release, he did not receive the required form to get his passport back.

Pro-reform demonstrations began sporadically in February 2011 but became larger and more frequent after the first killings of demonstrators the following month. Initially largely peaceful, the Syrian authorities responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. In the year since then, although peaceful demonstrations have continued, the unrest has turned increasingly violent, with armed opposition groups, many loosely under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) carrying out attacks mainly against Syrian security forces. Abuses by opposition forces have also been reported including torture or killing of captured members of the army and security forces, including the pro-government gangs known as *shabiha* and perceived supporters of the government and suspected informers. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 9,400 people reported to have died or been killed in relation to the unrest since mid-March 2011.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested since protests broke out and many, if not most, are believed to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Amnesty International has the names of more than 370 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see "*I wanted to die*": *Syria's torture survivors speak out* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>. Amnesty International has also received many reports of people apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide their families with any information on the fate of these people, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by the security forces.

Despite the Syrian government's acceptance on 27 March 2012 of the six-point plan drawn up by the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League on Syria, Kofi Annan, and the ceasefire agreement of 12 April, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic and widespread human rights violations which amount to crimes against humanity, and has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as an international arms embargo on Syria, and an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

Go to the interactive Eyes on Syria map (www.eyesonsyria.org) to see where human rights violations are being committed in Syria, and Amnesty International's global activism to seek justice.

Name: Amjad Kassem

Gender m/f: m

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