

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN MAN RELEASED, ANOTHER STILL DETAINED

On 17 September, shopkeeper Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi – arrested on 4 May – was released after being acquitted by a criminal court judge. His acquaintance Abd al-Akram al-Sakka was arrested on 15 July 2011, and is still detained in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

Shopkeeper **Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi**, aged around 65, was arrested on 4 May by members of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence. It was the third time he had been arrested since the start of the unrest in Syria in early 2011. He was held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance until his release on 17 September.

According to a relative overseas, Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi was held at the al-Mezzeh branch of the Air Force Intelligence for the duration of his detention, in a crowded cell. He was interrogated at least three times. During interrogation, he was beaten with electric cables and had cigarettes extinguished on his chest; the interrogators also burned his moustache. His relative told Amnesty International that Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi was brought before a military court judge on 16 September, who decided to transfer him to the criminal court in the Damascus suburb of Zablalani. He was acquitted by a judge on 17 September.

Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi told his relative that on 16 September, he saw his acquaintance **Abd al-Akram al-Sakka** – who since his arrest has been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance – in a corridor of the military court. The family believes that he is being held at Seydnaya prison but his legal status and whereabouts remain unconfirmed by the Syrian authorities. The authorities have still not officially notified Abd al-Akram al-Sakka's family about his detention, or the charges against him.

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

- Expressing concern that Abd al-Akram al-Sakka has been held in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance since 15 July 2011, and urging the Syrian authorities to grant him immediate access to his family, a lawyer of his choice, and all necessary medical treatment;
- Calling on the authorities to release Abd al-Akram al-Sakka unless he is promptly charged with a internationally recognizable criminal offence and tried in proceedings that respect international fair trial standards;
- Calling on the Syrian authorities to promptly set up an independent and impartial investigation into the allegations that Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi was tortured or otherwise ill-treated while in detention.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 DECEMBER 2012 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad

Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)
(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method; please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

'Imad al-Fraj

Fax: +963 11 223 7842 (keep trying)
+963 11 666 2460 (keep trying)
(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method; please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim

Fax: +963 11 214 6253 (keep trying)
(fax/phone line – say "Fax") (Fax is the only reliable communication method; please do not send letters)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country

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

This is the third update of UA 292/11. Further information: <http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/046/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Popular unrest which broke out in February 2011 calling for political reform has spiralled into an internal armed conflict throughout the country. Well over 26,000 individuals have died in the violence. Both sides have committed human rights abuses including possible war crimes and crimes against humanity, although the scale of abuses committed by government forces and their allied militias is much greater.

Amnesty International is calling on both sides to respect international humanitarian law and to protect civilians and for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. Additionally, Amnesty International is calling for an arms embargo on the Syrian government and for states considering supplying arms to the opposition to have in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure the material supplied is not used to commit human rights abuses and/or war crimes. Amnesty International also urges the Syrian government to allow the international independent commission of inquiry, as well as international human rights and humanitarian organizations, unfettered access to all parts of the country.

Shopkeeper Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi is the father of Haytham Al Hamwi, who was held for four years as a prisoner of conscience. Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi spent about two weeks in prison in July and August 2005, during his son's imprisonment, after participating in a conference that established a committee on behalf of prisoners of conscience in Syria. He was detained again between 1 and 26 May 2011, reportedly for attending a pro-reform demonstration. During this time, he was not allowed to take the medication he brought with him, but did receive visits from the prison doctor and was given different medication. He was arrested again on 23 September 2011 and released on 25 February 2012.

Abd al-Akram al-Sakka is an Islamic scholar. He had also been arrested previously before the current uprising began. In 2003, he served one year of a three-year prison sentence imposed on him by a military court. Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi's son, Haytham Al Hamwi, who is also the son-in-law of Abd al-Akram al-Sakka, talks about his relatives here: *Kept in the Dark – the murky world of enforced disappearances*, 29 August 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/kept-dark-murky-world-enforced-disappearances-2012-08-28>).

Amnesty International has received many reports of people like Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi and Abd al-Akram al-Sakka, who have apparently been subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have not provided their families with information on their fate. Most are believed to have been arrested by the security forces; some have been released after months of secret, incommunicado detention, while others remain missing.

The organisation has also received the names of some 650 persons believed to have died in the custody of the Syrian security forces since the beginning of the unrest – nearly 500 of them in 2012 alone. Amnesty International documented this practice in August 2012: *Deadly detention: Deaths in custody amid popular protest in Syria* (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/035/2011/en>). For an insight into torture and other ill-treatment in Syria's detention centres, please see: *I wanted to die: Syria's torture survivors speak out* of March 2012 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>).

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: Muhammad Yassin Al Hamwi, Abd al-Akram al-Sakka
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 292/11 Index: MDE 24/087/2012 Issue Date: 9 November 2012