

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE 01/437/2009
15 December 2009

Syria: Trial of Kurds likely to be a “parody of justice”

Amnesty International called for Syria's Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) to be abolished as the trial of five members of the Kurdish minority resumed today.

"The trial is likely to be a parody of justice as the SSSC has shown itself to be grossly unsatisfactory as a court of law," said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme. "It is neither independent nor impartial and it does not operate in accordance with international standards of fair trial. It should be abolished without further ado."

The five Kurds scheduled to appear before the SSSC today are accused of belonging to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), an unauthorized political party said to identify with Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). They are also accused of using violence at a rally held on 15 February 2008 in Aleppo to mark the anniversary of the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan by the Turkish authorities.

The five defendants are reported to have been held incommunicado for long periods following their arrests in 2008. Amnesty International has learnt that at least one defendant did not see his family for one year after being taken into detention.

Other information about their conditions of detention is not available because the families have been afraid to speak to human rights organizations, apparently for fear that the defendants will receive harsher sentences if they do.

Amnesty International knows that Kurdish minority activists and other suspected critics and opponents of the Syrian government have previously been tortured and otherwise ill-treated during months of incommunicado detention.

Defendants tried by the SSSC are frequently convicted on the basis of "confessions" that the security authorities say they made freely while held in pre-trial detention. These are generally accepted without question by the court even when defendants allege that they were extracted under torture or other ill-treatment and despite compelling evidence that the security services use torture to get the information they want.

Last month, at least another five Kurds were sentenced by the SSSC to up to 12 years' imprisonment for alleged affiliation with the PYD, after being held in incommunicado detention for - in most cases - at least 19 months. None of them had access to legal counsel before their trial and even during it they were permitted only very restricted contact with their lawyers.

Given the long-standing pattern of torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, all five are believed to

have been subjected to such abuses. The mother of one of the five is reported to have overheard one guard tell another that her son was being subjected to the "flying carpet" torture method, in which the victim's hands and feet are strapped to a piece of wood and he is then beaten and kicked.

"The SSSC has shown no interest in upholding defendants' rights to defence and to fair trial," said Malcolm Smart. "It has failed to order investigations into torture allegations or to stand up to the security authorities, and it has lost all credibility. It should be closed down and those accused of political and other crimes should be guaranteed fair trials and protected from torture and other abuse."

Background

The five Kurds in court today are Monzer Resho, aged 16 at the time of his arrest in 2008, Gewan Mohammed Ahmed, Hassan Khalil Qiddo, Khalil Dahli and Mannan Ahmed Sido.