

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 24/01/94

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Date: 14 February 1994

MEDICAL CONCERN

**Ahmad SUWAIDANI
SYRIA**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for Ahmad Suwaidani, a prisoner of conscience who is recently reported to have suffered a stroke causing right-sided paralysis affecting the face, hand and leg. He is aged around 65 and is reported to have been admitted to Teshmin Hospital in Damascus on 4 February 1994.

Ahmad Suwaidani is a former diplomat and member of the Ba'th Party Regional Command who was arrested on 11 July 1969 at Damascus Airport after returning from Iraq. He was suspected of being a pro-Iraqi Ba'thist. Since his arrest he has been detained in al-Mezze Military Prison in Damascus, and has never been brought before a judge or allowed to contact a lawyer. However, he has been allowed family visits. In July 1989, to mark his 20 years in detention, he went on hunger-strike to demand his release.

Ahmad Suwaidani is one of a group of elderly prisoners of conscience who have been detained for over two decades, in his case for nearly 25 years. Three of them have died during the last 14 months - Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi, the former President of Syria, Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil, a former Minister of the Interior and Salah Jadid, a former Chief-of-Staff in the Syrian Army and senior official of the Ba'th Party. Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi and Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil suffered serious health problems as a result of which they were released in August 1992. Both died a few months later: Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi in December 1992 as a result of cancer of the oesophagus, and Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil in April 1993. Salah Jadid died in custody in al-Mezze Military prison in August 1993. The government stated that he had died from natural causes, citing the cause of death as "septic shock, acute kidney failure and a sharp drop in blood pressure". No information was given about what led to septic shock, however, and despite appeals from Amnesty International no further information has been made available. No independent autopsy or inquest into the death is known to have been carried out.

Amnesty International wrote to President Hafez al-Assad in August 1993 expressing grave concern both about the deaths and about the well-being and medical care of eight such prisoners held without charge or trial for over 20 years.

Amnesty International is again urgently reiterating its call to President Hafez al-Assad for the immediate and unconditional release of Ahmad Suwaidani and the other seven prisoners. The seven are Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, Hadithe Murade, Dafi Jam'ani, 'Abd al-Hamid Miqdad, 'Adel Na'issa, Fawzi Rida and Mustafa Rustum, who have been held since their arrests between 1970 and 1972. The prisoners are all said to be in poor health, in particular Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, who is reported to be suffering from acute anaemia, rheumatism and a gastric ulcer.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Middle East
Date: 14 February 1994

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Ahmad SUWAIDANI
SYRIA**

Keywords

Theme: POCs/ill-health/detention without charge or trial

Summary

Ahmad Suwaidani is a prisoner of conscience in his mid-sixties who is reported to have suffered a stroke in early February 1994 following which he was hospitalized in Damascus. He has been held without charge or trial since his arrest in 1969. There is also concern for the well-being of a further seven elderly prisoners similarly held without charge or trial for over 20 years and all of whom are said to be in ailing health. Please see the details attached.

Recommended Actions

Letters, express letters and telexes are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

- expressing concern for Ahmad Suwaidani following his recent hospitalization and seeking information on his present condition and the treatment he is receiving
- seeking assurances that he will be provided with all necessary medical and rehabilitative care
- noting that there are a further seven elderly prisoners in al-Mezze prison who have been held for over 20 years without charge or trial and seeking guarantees that they too will receive any medical care and treatment they require
- urging the immediate and unconditional release of Ahmad Suwaidani (arrested 1969) and the seven others held since arrest in the early 1970s

Address

His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President Al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 munjed sy

Salutation: Your Excellency

Copies to:

diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country