

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**UA 139/91      Health Concern\Prisoner of Conscience**

**25 April 1991**

**SYRIA:                      Riad al-Turk**

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Amnesty International is deeply concerned at reports of the continuing deterioration of the health of Riad al-Turk, a lawyer and First Secretary of the prohibited Communist Party Political Bureau, (CPPB). Riad al-Turk was arrested on 28 October 1980 by agents of al-Amn al-Siyassi (Political Security), and has been held incommunicado since his arrest. He has never been charged or tried. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and has been calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Riad al-Turk, aged 60, is reported to have gone into a coma in mid-March 1991 as a result of renal failure and to have been transferred to Tishrin Hospital in Damascus. He remained there for about 15 days and was then returned to the Military Interrogation Branch, the detention centre in Damascus where he has been held incommunicado since his arrest in October 1980. Reports received indicate that Riad al-Turk has not made a complete recovery from his recent relapse, and his health continues to cause grave anxiety. Medical facilities at the Military Interrogation Branch are said to be insufficient to allow the proper monitoring of Riad al-Turk's condition or the provision of the care he should be receiving.

Riad al-Turk is reported to have been severely tortured at various stages throughout his detention, as a result of which his life has been in danger and he needed to be rushed into intensive care. He is also reported to have been denied essential medical care for a variety of health complaints, including diabetes. He has suffered from kidney failure, chronic heart disease and high blood pressure as well as difficulty moving his limbs. Numerous appeals on his behalf have been made by Amnesty International since 1981 (including UA 18/88, MDE 24/01/88, dated 22 January 1988, and subsequent follow-ups). No response has ever been received from the Syrian authorities.

Reports received in 1988 indicated that the Syrian authorities had set up a committee in the third week of February 1988 to look into his case in view of his deteriorating health. However, the exact size and composition of the committee, and the results of any investigation into his case, remain unknown.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The CPPB was founded in 1973 under the leadership of Riad al-Turk. Since its foundation the party has faced periodic suppression and the arrest of its members because of its opposition to the policies of the present government in Syria and especially to the Syrian intervention in Lebanon since 1976. Over 200 members of the CPPB have been arrested since October 1980 and held without charge or trial.

Riad al-Turk was born in Homs in March 1931. He is married and has two children. His family have not seen him since the day of his arrest. His wife, Asma al-Faisal, is a doctor in Homs. She was arrested as a hostage while the authorities searched for her husband. However, she remained in detention even after her husband's arrest and was released

at the end of 1982.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/telexes/airmail letters:**

- expressing grave concern at recent reports of the deterioration in the health of Riad al-Turk, emphasising the fact that he has required emergency admittance to hospital on a number of occasions in the past;
- expressing concern at reports that although he may not have made a complete recovery from his recent relapse, Riad al-Turk has been returned to incommunicado detention at the Military Interrogation Branch where medical facilities are reported to be inadequate;
- requesting precise details of his present state of health, including details of any tests carried out and the exact diagnosis made;
- urging that he be allowed immediate access to his family, and to doctors of his choice, including, if possible, a representative of an international medical humanitarian organization;
- expressing concern that he has been held incommunicado without charge or trial for over 10 years as a prisoner of conscience, and urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released.

**APPEALS TO:**

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

His Excellency Muhammad Harba  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**

His Excellency Khaled al-Ansari  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
Nasr Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria**

His Excellency Dr. Iyad al-Shatti  
Minister of Health  
Ministry of Health  
al-Majlis al-Niyabi Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Health Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: HEALTH 412655 SY**

**COPIES TO**

Dr. M. Cherif Bakle	Maître
Ordre des Medecins Syriens	President of the Syrian Bar Association
Place de l'Etoile	rue Mayssaloun
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic	Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

and to diplomatic representatives of Syria in your country.

**PLEASE ORGANIZE APPEALS FROM MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS AND LEGAL PROFESSIONALS**

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section

office, if sending appeals after 6 June 1991.