

PUBLIC

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05 January 2007

UA 09/07 Fear of torture and other ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/forcible return/medical concern

SYRIA Yassin Suleiman, (m) Kurd, aged 35
His father, name not known, aged over 60

The two Syrian Kurdish men named above were apparently detained on 21 December. They are believed to be held incommunicado, reportedly by State Security (Amn al-Dawla), which puts them at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Their arrest appears to be connected to Yassin Suleiman's alleged membership of the unauthorized Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party.

Yassin Suleiman and his wife and daughter had travelled to Norway and sought asylum around the end of 2004. The Norwegian authorities rejected their application, and in early November 2006, the family were forcibly returned, accompanied on their journey by two Norwegian police officers.

After arriving in Damascus, Yassin Suleiman and his wife and daughter returned to their home in al-Hassaka, close to the north-eastern town of Qamishli. Shortly afterwards, Yassin Suleiman was reportedly summoned to attend the State Security office in Qamishli, which he did on 21 December, and was referred to the State Security branch in Damascus. He went to Damascus, apparently followed by his father who is over 60 years old and suffers from high blood pressure. They were both arrested on arrival and their family's attempts to obtain information about them have so far failed. On 3 January the State Security branch told one of the family that they were not permitted to see Yassin Suleiman or his father.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture and ill-treatment is routinely inflicted on Syrian Kurdish political prisoners, while they are held incommunicado in Syrian prisons and detention centres. The Syrian authorities impose heavy restrictions on the production and circulation of Kurdish literature, including books and music. Many Kurds are also denied the full provision of education, employment and health care, as well as the right to use their own language in schools and other public places. Those deemed to be associated with Kurdish political parties or groups who may raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in Syria are vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention and in many cases to torture and other ill-treatment. They face charges including belonging to "illegal" organisations and "attempting to sever part of the Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state". These charges can lead to unfair trials before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) or military courts, whose practices fall far below international standards for fair trial (see UA 3/06, MDE 24/002/2007).

According to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Norway is a contracting state, no one should be "... expelled or returned in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Yassin Suleiman and his father are reportedly being held incommunicado by State Security;
- calling on the authorities to provide immediate guarantees that they are not being tortured or otherwise ill-treated;

- urging them to allow Yassin Suleiman and his father visits from their family, a lawyer of their choosing and any medical treatment they may require, and reminding them that the father is reported to suffer from high blood pressure for which he may require medication;
- calling on the authorities to release both men immediately unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
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Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General
Hassan Ali Turkmani
Ministry of Defence
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Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
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Ministry of Interior

General Bassam Abdel Majid
Minister of Interior
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
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Syrian Arab Republic

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Email: somi@net.sy
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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 February 2007.