

EXTERNAL

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Health concern / Prisoner of conscience

7 November 1995

SYRIAFaraj Ahmad Birqdar, poet and journalist, aged 43

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Faraj Ahmad Birqdar, a long-term prisoner of conscience currently held in Sadnaya prison, is reportedly being denied adequate medical care for serious injuries sustained as a result of torture in pre-trial incommunicado detention. In particular, repeated sessions on *al-Kursi al-almani*, the German Chair (a metal chair with moving parts which causes acute hyperextension of the spine and severe pressure on the victim's neck and limbs), have reportedly left him with vertebral damage. He is believed to have suffered a lumbar fracture, resulting in him being unable to walk unaided.

Faraj Birqdar was arrested in March 1987 and held incommunicado for nearly seven years, before being brought before a Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in 1993.

He was accused of belonging to the unauthorized *Hizb al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i*, Party of Communist Action (PCA), and on 17 October 1993 he was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. Amnesty International believes that SSSC procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing serious concern about the health of Faraj Ahmad Birqdar, and seeking assurances that he is being provided with all necessary medical treatment;
- calling for an impartial and independent investigation into allegations that Faraj Birqdar was tortured in pre-trial incommunicado detention, and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Faraj Birqdar as a prisoner of conscience.

*Appeals from doctors and other health professionals would be welcome.*

**APPEALS TO:**

1) His Excellency  
President Hafez al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
Abu Rummaneh  
Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: President Al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: 419160 munjed sy**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

2) His Excellency  
Dr. Muhammad Harba  
Minister of the Interior  
Ministry of the Interior  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria**  
**Telexes: 411018 AFIRS SY**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

3) 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**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

4) Director  
Sadnaya Prison  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Telegrams: Director, Sadnaya Prison, Damascus, Syria**  
**Salutation: Dear Director**

**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 24 December 1995.