

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 24/11/95

Distrib: PG/SC

To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Middle East Regional Program
Date: 31 December 1995

FURTHER INFORMATION ON MEDICAL CONCERN

(See MDE 24/05/95 - 19 June 1995; MDE 24/07/95 - 19 September 1995)

Health professionals imprisoned in 1980

SYRIA

Profession/association: Doctor/ surgeon/ GP/ ophthalmologist/ pharmacist/ gynaecologist/
medical student/ veterinary surgeon/ dentist

Theme: Detention without trial/ ill-treatment/ death in custody/ disappearance/ release

Following news of a large-scale amnesty at the end of November 1995, Amnesty International has now learned that 1,200 political prisoners have been released in Syria. The releases marked the anniversary of President al-Assad's 25th year in power.

One recently released detainee who had been held in Sadnaga Prison near Damascus, told Amnesty International that on 19 November he and a group of 75 others were taken to meet the prison director who informed them that they had been granted a presidential amnesty and were about to be released. Six days later he was able to return home.

Further to this, President al-Assad presented an amnesty bill to parliament on 14 December 1995 which should lead to further releases in future. There are reports that Syria is preparing to release a further 5,000 prisoners, including non-political prisoners.

For several years Amnesty International has published information on over 100 health professionals who were arrested in 1980 following a strike called by professional associations in April of that year. The strike was the culmination of protests led by the Syrian Bar, Medical and Engineers' Associations to call for an end to the state of emergency in force since 1963 and a restoration of rights and legal safeguards. Many of the health professionals arrested at the time were believed to have been held into the 1990s without charge or trial.

Although it is not yet possible to confirm the names of those benefiting from the most recent amnesty, it is likely that a number of the health professionals were among those released. (Amnesty International has received information of three doctors being among those released although, again, their names cannot at this stage be confirmed.) It has also learned that two other doctors included in the list of 104 health professionals published by the organization were released at an earlier date. Yasir Zahra, a medical student at the time of his arrest, was released in 1991 and Imad Za'tar, a general practitioner was released in 1994.

Amnesty International welcomes the November 1995 amnesty and is seeking information on whether any of the health professionals imprisoned as a result of the 1980 strike remain in prison. It has requested a list of those released under the recent amnesty.

Late update: AI has confirmed that Muwaffaq Hasan Walid (case number 100 in the June 1995 AI list) was among those released in November. Mr Walid was a medical student at the time of his detention in 1980.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the addresses below:

- welcoming the amnesty of prisoners which was granted in November 1995
- noting that you have written on previous occasions about health professionals detained following a 1980 strike led by professional associations
- asking whether any of those health professionals remain in prison

Addresses

President
His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummanh
Al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Minister of Justice
His Excellency
Mr Hasin Hasun
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Copies

His Excellency
Dr Muhammad Iyad al-Shatti
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
Al-Majlis al-Nigabi
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic