

## **Syria's longest serving political prisoner must be released**

The Syrian authorities should immediately release Syria's longest serving prisoner, Abd al-Majid Zaghmout, and allow him access to the medical care he needs, Amnesty International urged today.

The 54 year-old prisoner has been on a hunger strike in 'Adra civil prison for 13 days in protest at his continued imprisonment after an unfair trial in 1966. He has repeatedly petitioned the Syrian authorities for his release and appealed to international organizations to act on his case. He previously went on a hunger strike in early 1996.

"This man has been detained for 32 years after an unfair trial, despite the fact that his release was ordered nine years ago-- and he may now be the longest serving political prisoner in the Middle East," Amnesty International said. "He should be released immediately."

A former member of Fatah, the mainstream faction in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and a resident of the Yarmuk Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, he was arrested on 10 May 1966 and charged with the murder of Palestinian guerrilla leader Yusuf 'Urabi.

He has consistently denied the charge, alleging that he was tortured for 46 days following his arrest. He was sentenced to death later that year by an exceptional Military Court after a summary and grossly unfair trial.

The death sentence, however, was never carried out, and in 1989 the Minister of Defence commuted it to a prison term equivalent to the time he had already spent in custody and ordered that he be released if not charged with another crime.

Although no further charges were brought against him, he remains in detention and reportedly suffers from heart problems, high blood pressure, severe weight loss and other physical and psychological problems. He is also suffering from an acute ulcer attack and is in need of urgent medical attention.

### **Background information**

Hundreds of Syrian and non-Syrian political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, have been detained for years in Syrian jails, many without charge or trial, and others following grossly unfair trials.

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