

PUBLIC

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26 June 2003

UA 188/03 Possible prisoners of conscience/fear of torture or ill-treatment/incommunicado detention

SYRIA Mohammed Mustafa (m)
Khaled Ahmed 'Ali (m)
Sherif Ramadhan (m)
'Amr Mourad (m)
Salar Saleh (m)
Hosam Muhammed Amin (m)
Hussayn Ramadhan (m)

The seven men named above were detained on 25 June by Syrian security forces. They are reportedly being held incommunicado and without charge at Mezze Police Station in Damascus and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention. They may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

The men, all Syrian Kurds, were detained during a peaceful protest outside the Damascus headquarters of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, to mark World Children's Day. Between two hundred and three hundred demonstrators, including a number of children, were calling for civil and political rights for the Syrian Kurdish population, including the right of Syrian Kurdish children to be taught in the Kurdish language. The demonstration was dispersed violently by police and security forces, and about twenty people were injured, including two who needed hospital treatment. Eight protesters were arrested but one, reportedly a journalist for an American media channel, was released shortly afterwards.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture and ill-treatment is routinely inflicted on Syrian Kurdish political detainees 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.

In the past, the Syrian authorities have arrested and detained Syrian Kurds without charge for their involvement in the organization of Kurdish cultural activities. On 15 December 2002, prisoners of conscience Hassan Saleh and Marwan 'Uthman, leading members of the Syrian Kurdish Yeketi Party, were detained in Damascus after being invited to a meeting by the Minister of the Interior, Major General 'Ali Hammud (see UA 366/02, MDE 24/012/2002, 18 December 2002, and follow-ups). Their detention came five days after a peaceful demonstration in front of the National Assembly in Damascus, similarly demanding greater protection for the rights of Kurds living in Syria. Hassan Saleh and Marwan 'Uthman are being tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Amnesty International considers trials held before the SSSC to be grossly unfair.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Mohammed Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali, Sherif Ramadhan, 'Amr Mourad, Salar Saleh, Hosam Muhammed Amin and Hussayn Ramadhan, who were detained on 25 June during a peaceful demonstration outside the UNICEF headquarters in Damascus;
- seeking assurances that the seven men will be treated humanely in detention, and will not be subjected to torture or ill-treatment;

- urging that they be given immediate and unrestricted access to relatives, lawyers and any medical treatment they may need;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release as possible prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- urging the authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in accordance with international human rights standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a state party.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
President Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telex: 419160 prespl sy
Fax: + 96311 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Maj-Gen Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telex: 411016 AFIRS SY
Fax: + 96311 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

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 7 August 2003.