

26 June 2002

Further information on UA 217/01 (MDE 24/027/2001, 3 September 2001) and follow-up (MDE 24/013/2002, 7 May 2002) - Prisoner of Conscience/Health Concern NEW CONCERN: Unfair trial

SYRIA Riad al-Turk (m), aged 72, lawyer

On 26 June, prisoner of conscience Riad al-Turk was sentenced to two and a half years in prison by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), on charges of Attempting to change the constitution by illegal means.

He was initially sentenced on four counts to 11 years in prison. The SSSC then applied the harshest sentence of five years and immediately reduced it to two and a half years.

Riad al-Turk is a leading member of an opposition coalition, the National Democratic Alliance. Amnesty International considers his trial to be grossly unfair and calls for his immediate release as prisoner of conscience.

Amnesty International remains concerned about the health of Riad al-Turk who requires regular medical care for his heart condition and diabetes (see further information on UA 217/01, AI Index: MDE 24/013/2002, 7 May 2002).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SSSC is placed outside the ordinary criminal justice system and is accountable only to the Minister of Interior, who is by delegation the Martial Law Governor, in charge of overseeing the implementation of the State of Emergency Law. Its verdicts are not subject to appeal, and it is not bound by the rules of the Code of Criminal Procedures. SSSC trials are also unfair because defendants have restricted access to lawyers; judges, especially the President of the Court, have been granted wide discretionary powers, and confessions allegedly extracted under duress or torture are accepted as evidence.

Many thanks to all those who sent appeals. We will now use longer-term campaigning methods on behalf of Riad al-Turk. Please send a final round of appeals in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- expressing concern at the trial and sentencing of Riad al-Turk, who is being held solely for the peaceful expression of his political opinion;
- urging the authorities to provide Riad al-Turk with any medical treatment he may need in particular for his heart condition and diabetes;
- calling for the procedures of the State Security Court (SSSC) to conform with the requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency

President Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 prespl sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Nabil al-Khatib
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria
e-mail: moj@net.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
Maj-Gen Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY
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 2002.