

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/033/2005

25 May 2005

UA 140/05 Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment

SYRIA **Muhammad Ra'dun (m), aged 56, lawyer and Head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights – Syria (AOHR-S)**
Nizar Ristnawi (m), founding member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights – Syria (AOHR-S)

Human rights defenders Muhammad Ra'dun and Nizar Ristnawi are being detained incommunicado and are in danger of torture and ill-treatment. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for carrying out their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Muhammad Ra'dun, a lawyer and head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights – Syria (AOHR-S), was arrested on 22 May at his office in Latakia, on the west coast, by Political Security officers. Initially, he was held at the Political Security detention centre in Latakia and then transferred to another Political Security branch in the capital Damascus. Muhammad Ra'dun has reportedly been charged with "disseminating false information" apparently in connection with statements made by the AOHR-S on human rights in Syria. Nizar Ristnawi, a founding member of the AOHR-S, was arrested on 18 April and is being held without charge at an unknown location. His detention is also believed to be related to his human rights work.

Muhammad Ra'dun is one of several human rights defenders in Syria who are prevented from leaving the country on account of their human rights work. On 23 November 2004, Muhammad Ra'dun and his colleague Dr Mahmoud al-'Aryan were prevented from travelling to a human rights conference organised by the AOHR in Egypt.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights and civil society organizations are not permitted to operate in Syria and human rights defenders have for decades been subjected to human rights violations by the authorities including arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, torture and ill-treatment, unfair trials and restriction of their movement. The arrest of Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun appears to be part of a sudden increase in the harassment of human rights defenders and curtailment of their activities (see AI statement MDE 24/034/2005, 25 May 2005, and previous documents including MDE 24/028/2005, 20 May 2005; MDE 24/029/2005, 23 May 2005; UA 131/05, MDE 24/027/2005, 19 May 2005; and UA 139/05, MDE 24/032/2005).

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

- calling for the immediate release of Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun, who are prisoners of conscience detained solely for carrying out their peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
- urging the authorities to disclose Nizar Ristnawi's whereabouts immediately;
- expressing concern that Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun are being held incommunicado and asking that they be allowed visits from their families, a lawyer of their choice and any medical attention that they may require;
- seeking assurances that Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun are not being subjected to torture or ill-treatment;
- reminding the authorities that torture is, as stated by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture, "most frequently practised during incommunicado detention [which] should be made illegal, and persons held incommunicado should be released without delay";

- reminding the authorities that if brought to trial on the charges against him, Muhammad Ra'dun is entitled to a fair hearing in line with international standards for fair trial;
- reminding the authorities that Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens, and that in detaining Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun, the authorities are breaching their obligations under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which affirms the right to enjoy freedoms of opinion and expression (Article 19).

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency General Ghazi Kan'an
Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax + 963 11 222 3428
Email: mi@net.sy or admin@civilaffair-moi.gov.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Email: moj@net.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 6 July 2005.