

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/039/2003

05 November 2003

Further Information on UA 185/03 (MDE 24/020/2003, 24 June 2003) and follow-up (MDE 24/026/2003, 23 July 2003) - Torture/incommunicado detention/prisoner of conscience/legal concern

SYRIA

'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri (m), aged 31

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at reports that prisoner of conscience 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri was tortured in detention before being transferred to Sednaya Prison, on the outskirts of the capital, Damascus. He may be at risk of further torture or ill-treatment in Sednaya Prison.

'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri is a prisoner of conscience held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. According to reports, he has now been charged with offences connected to his use of the Internet to send news stories to friends, though the exact charges remain unclear. He is apparently expected to be tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in December 2003. The procedures of the SSSC are known to be seriously flawed, and Amnesty International is concerned that 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri will not receive a fair trial.

'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri, who is married with two children, was arrested by security personnel at a checkpoint between the town of Qunaytra and Damascus on 23 February 2003. On the same day, secret police agents reportedly entered his house and confiscated his computer, fax, CDs and other computer-related items. 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri has reportedly been held incommunicado since his arrest, but according to reports, his lawyer will be given access to him in the next few days.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned the use of torture and other ill-treatment in Syria which is routinely inflicted on political detainees while they are held incommunicado in prisons and detention centres.

Internet access in Syria is carefully monitored by the authorities and websites deemed undesirable for political or moral reasons are censored. The cost of internet use is, in any case, beyond the means of most Syrians. Unfettered access can only be achieved by dialling internet service providers in neighbouring countries. Ironically, President Bashar al-Assad was formerly head of the Syrian Computer Society.

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

- expressing concern at reports that 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri has been tortured in detention;
- urging the authorities to ensure that during his detention 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri's rights are fully respected, including the right to humane treatment; the right to prompt access to and assistance of a lawyer; and the right to be able to communicate with, and receive visits from family and friends;
- urging that he be given access to any medical treatment he may require;
- calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into the alleged torture of 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri, with the results to be made public and anyone found responsible to be brought to justice;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri as a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his legitimate right to freedom of expression.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
President Bashar al-Assad

Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telex: 419160 prespl sy
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
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Telex: 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 17 December 2003.