

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/043/2005

30 June 2005

Further Information on UA 140/05 (MDE 24/033/2005, 24 May 2005) and follow-up (MDE 24/037/2005, 3 June 2005) - Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/legal concern

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 AOHR-S

Human rights defender Nizar Ristnawi is now believed to be held at the Military Security branch in his home town of Hama, in western Syria. He is still held incommunicado and without charge, and is in grave danger of torture and other ill-treatment.

Muhammad Ra'dun has now been transferred to 'Adra Prison, near the capital, Damascus, where he is reportedly in solitary confinement. He is awaiting trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on charges of "disseminating false information" and with "involvement in an illegal organisation of an international nature". If convicted he faces more than three years' imprisonment.

Amnesty International considers both men to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for carrying out their peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

Nizar Ristnawi was arrested on 18 April, but his family were reportedly not informed and did not know what had happened to him. They attempted to find him by placing an advertisement in a national newspaper, saying he was missing. It was apparently more than two weeks before Military Security told the family that they were holding him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The past few weeks have seen a sudden increase in the authorities' harassment of people they view as critics, including a number of human rights defenders. Several have been detained, some incommunicado, and some have been charged by the SSSC, whose standards fall far short of international standards for fair trial (see AI public statement *Syria: End crackdown on human rights defenders*, MDE 24/034/2005, 25 May 2005). 'Ali al-'Abdullah, a member of both the Committees for the Revival of Civil Society and the Human Rights Association of Syria, was arrested on the night of 15 May because of a statement he had read out on 7 May at a discussion group, the Jamal al-Atassi Forum, on behalf of the exiled leader of the banned Muslim Brotherhood. He has been charged by the SSSC with "promoting an illegal organisation". He is now in solitary confinement in 'Adra Prison and his trial is expected to begin on 30 October 2005 (see UA 139/05), MDE 24/032/2005, 25 May 2005 and follow-ups).

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

- calling on the authorities to release Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun immediately, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
- calling for the charges against Muhammad Ra'dun to be dropped, and reminding the authorities that if brought to trial, he is entitled to a fair hearing in line with international standards for fair trial;
- seeking assurances that Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun will not be tortured or ill-treated;

- expressing concern that Nizar Ristnawi is held incommunicado and reminding them that he and Muhammad Ra'dun should be given regular access to their families, lawyers of their own choosing and any medical care they may require;
- urging the authorities to release Muhammad Ra'dun from solitary confinement and to allow him to mix with other detainees;
- 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 on Civil and Political Rights, which affirms the right to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19).

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
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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
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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 12 August 2005.