

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/065/2004

5 October 2004

Further Information on UA 155/04 (MDE 24/038/2004, 26 April 2004; MDE 24/040/2004, 17 May 2004; MDE 24/059/2004, 1 September 2004) Prisoners of conscience/torture/unfair trial

SYRIA Muhannad al-Dabas (m)] university students
 Muhammad 'Arab (m)]

The trial of Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab began on 26 September, before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). Their lawyer told the court that the students had retracted "confessions" they had made during interrogation, claiming they had been obtained "as a result of beatings and psychological torture". The head of the court did not respond to this statement.

The trial session was closed to the public: even the men's families were prevented from attending. Their lawyer has not yet been able to meet with them outside the courtroom.

Trials before the SSSC fall short of international standards for fair trials: there are severe restrictions on the defendant's right to obtain effective legal representation and convicted prisoners may not appeal to a higher court. Amnesty International has voiced concerns over the years that the SSSC appears to be neither independent nor impartial. It appears to routinely accept "confessions" without investigating claims that they have been extracted under torture or duress.

Both men are now held at 'Adra Prison, just outside the capital, Damascus. After more two months' detention without any visits, Muhannad al-Dabas is now allowed monthly visits from his wife and six-year-old son, for 30 minutes each time, after they have completed a lengthy application process. Mother and son must undergo a physical examination before entering the prison – even the boy is forced to undress down to his underpants – and they are separated from Muhannad al-Dabas by a metal grille. They have been allowed to bring him clothes and books, but not the notebook, pen and candle which the boy wanted to give his father as a present: "To write to me with, Papa, and to light and remember me with, Papa."

The situation is believed to be the same for Muhammad 'Arab. The next trial session is scheduled for 31 October.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab have been beaten and psychologically tortured in detention;
- calling on the authorities to investigate these allegations, and to prosecute anyone found to have tortured or ill-treated these men;
- calling for Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- expressing concern that Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab are being tried before the SSSC, whose trials fall short of international standards for fair trials;
- urging the authorities to allow Muhannad al-Dabas and Muhammad 'Arab immediate and unrestricted access to their families and lawyers, and to any medical treatment they may need.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
President
Presidential Palace

Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 222 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 16 November 2004.