

Further Information on UA 41/06 (MDE 24/019/2006, 17 February 2006) and follow-ups (MDE 24/020/2006, 21 February 2006; MDE 24/023/2006, 7 March 2006; MDE 24/029/2006, 31 March 2006; MDE 24/036/2006, 11 May 2006; MDE 24/059/2006, 3 October 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience

**SYRIA**

- 'Ali Nizar 'Ali (m), aged 21, student
- Husam 'Ali Mulhim (m), aged 21, student
- Tarek Ghorani (m), student
- Maher Ibrahim (m), aged around 25, shop owner
- Ayham Saqr (m), aged around 30, works in a beauty salon
- 'Alam Fakhour (m) aged around 26
- 'Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged around 21, student
- Diab Sirieyeh (m), aged around 26, part-time student

The trial of the eight men prisoners of conscience named above began on 26 November, before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) in Damascus. Their trial is very unlikely to be fair. Each man denied the charges, and said that he had been tortured to make him confess. The trial has been adjourned until 14 January 2007. They are still held incommunicado, putting them in danger of further torture or ill-treatment.

All except 'Ali Nizar 'Ali have been charged under Article 278 of the Syrian Penal Code, which deals with taking action or making a written statement or speech which could endanger the State or harm its relationship with a foreign country, or expose it to the risk of hostile action by that country. All eight are charged under Article 287, which deals with "broadcasting of false news" deemed to be harmful to the state. During the hearing the judge is believed to have accused them of having links with an opposition party based outside Syria.

These young men have been held incommunicado since they were arrested, between 26 January and 18 March 2006. They were reportedly tortured, with at least one of them being beaten with a bamboo stick, during interrogation at the Air Force Intelligence Branch in the town of Harasta, near Damascus. They were apparently held in solitary confinement for three months.

They have only had access to legal counsel during the hearing, when they met briefly with lawyers at the court, with guards present. At least one of them was allowed to meet with his parents inside the courtroom, for just three minutes, in the presence of a guard. Their families were reportedly not allowed to give them warm clothing at the court which they had brought to protect them from the cold conditions at the prison where they are held, Sednaya, on the outskirts of Damascus.

Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah's brother and father were both prisoners of conscience, detained for their legitimate work in defence of human rights. Both were released in October 2006, after seven months in custody (see UA 73/06, MDE 24/028/2006, 31 March 2006, and follow-ups). For more information on this and similar cases visit the AI website: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-syr/index>.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trials before the SSSC are known to fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants have no right of appeal; they are given only restricted access to their lawyers, and confessions allegedly extracted under torture are admissible as evidence. The practice of torture and other ill-treatment is systematic in Syria.

Syrian civil society activists and human rights defenders are regularly arrested, and often held without trial for months or years.

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

- expressing concern at allegations that the eight men (naming them) have confessed under torture, and reminding the authorities that such confessions are not admissible in a court of law;
- calling on the authorities to release all eight men immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression;
- expressing concern that they have been held incommunicado for over nine months, which puts them at risk of torture or ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to ensure that none of the eight young men is tortured or ill-treated ;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against the eight men before the SSSC must comply with international

standards for fair trial.

**APPEALS TO: (Fax numbers may be difficult to get through to; please keep trying)**

President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad  
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Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: + 963 11 332 3410**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General  
Hassan Ali Turkmani  
Ministry of Defence  
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**Fax: +963 11 223 7842**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
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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 1 February 2007.\*\*\*\*\*