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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 37/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - SYRIA

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Kuwait - 24 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 170

Women - 8 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 161/26

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Korea - 9 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 32/94

\*\*Jordan - 22 March\*\* -

News release and short document planned for day before Jordan presents its case to the UN Human Rights Committee in New York. IS delegates plan to be in New York and we may launch this from New York (discussion with Section and UN office still needed).

South Africa (Bophuthatswana) - 11 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

Turkey - 6 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 26/94

Hong Kong - 21 April - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

## FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56-57/93

South Africa - 31 March - POSTPONED INDEFINITELY

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - NOTE CHANGE OF DATE - more details to follow \*\*Burundi - 16 May\*\* - SEE NEWS SERVICE 36/94

**News Service 37/94**

**AI INDEX: MDE 24/WU 01/1994  
24 February 1994**

**SYRIA: THREE LONG TERM PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE RELEASED**

Amnesty International welcomes the release, on 21 February, of three long term prisoners of conscience, one of whom, Ahmad Suwaidani, has been detained without charge or trial for nearly a quarter of a century. However, the organization continues to be concerned about other former government members and Ba'th Party officials who still remain in detention without charge or trial in Syria.

Ahmad Suwaidani, now aged 65, was a former diplomat and member of the Ba'th Party Regional Command. He was arrested on 11 July 1969 as a suspected pro-Iraqi Ba'thist. On 4 February 1994 he was admitted to Tishrin Hospital in Damascus after suffering what appeared to be a stroke, which paralysed the right side of his face, his right hand and leg. On 14 February, Amnesty International issued urgent appeals to the Syrian Government seeking assurances about his access to adequate medical care and reiterating its call for his immediate and unconditional release.

The other two detainees released on 21 February were Mustafa Rustum and Hadithe Murad. Both were former leading members of the Ba'th Party Regional Command and were arrested in December 1970 following the bloodless coup d'etat in November of that year which brought President Hafez al-Assad to power.

These two were among many former government and Ba'th Party officials arrested between 1970 and 1972 and detained without charge or trial. Most have since been released, mainly on health grounds. Two of those, Dr Nour al-Din al-Atassi, a former President of Syria, and Muhammad Rabah al-Tawil, a former Minister of Interior, died within a few months of their release in August 1992. A third member of this group of prisoners of conscience, Salah Jadid, a lieutenant-colonel in the Syrian Army and Army Chief-of-Staff between 1963 and 1965, died in custody on 19 August 1993, after almost 23 years in detention without charge or trial. Amnesty International had appealed to the Syrian government many times for his release.

Amnesty International wrote to the Syrian government expressing its deep regret at the death of Salah Jadid. The letter also stated that this "...emerging pattern of deaths among this group of former government and Ba'th Party officials causes our organization grave concern, particularly as seven of them remain detained without charge or trial since their arrest... We regard the seven as prisoners of conscience and reiterate our strong appeal for their immediate and unconditional release." The human rights organization launched a worldwide appeal on behalf of these prisoners, carried in its February 1994 International Newsletter.

Following the release of Hadithe Murad and Mustafa Rustum, five of the seven detainees mentioned above are still being held in al-Mezze Prison in Damascus. They are Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, now aged 64; Dafi Jam'ani, a Jordanian national now in his early seventies; 'Abd al-Hamid Miqdad, aged 58; Fawzi Rida and 'Adel Na'issa, both of whom are in their mid-sixties. Amnesty International's concerns about their well-being persist, particularly since some, such as Muhammad 'Id 'Ashawi, are said to be suffering from serious ailments.

Amnesty International reiterates its appeal for the immediate and unconditional release of the five remaining detainees in al-Mezze Prison and all other prisoners of conscience in Syria. The organization also calls on the Syrian Government to ensure that these prisoners are given proper medical care.

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