

Worldwide appeals January 2003

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Syria

Lebanese Youth held without trial for 20 years

Yousef Daoud 'Aoun was a child aged 17, when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. On 3 June 1982 he and his friend were arrested near the town of Seghbine in the Eastern Bekaa region by members of the Syrian Nationalist Social Party. They were handed over to the Syrian Military Intelligence reportedly on charges of belonging to the "Lebanese Forces" militia, which fought against the Syrian forces in Lebanon. Since then Yousef Daoud 'Aoun has been held without trial in a prison in Syria.

Yousef Daoud 'Aoun's parents visited him regularly for many years in Tadmur Prison until 1999 when they were refused any further visits. It is not known where Yousef Daoud 'Aoun is now being held, since large parts of Tadmur Prison were closed down in 2001 and many political detainees were transferred to other prisons.

On 22 July 2002, Yousef Daoud 'Aoun's parents travelled with 50 other relatives of Lebanese believed to be detained in Syria to Damascus, where they were received by the Syrian Minister of the Interior, Major General 'Ali Hammud. During the meeting the Minister promised to answer their queries about Lebanese detainees held in Syria within three months. However, no answer has been received.

Please write, asking the Syrian authorities where Yousef Daoud 'Aoun is being held. Call for his immediate release as he has been held for a long period without trial. Seek assurances that Yousef Daoud 'Aoun is well and not being subjected to torture or ill-treatment. Call for all information about the detention of Lebanese in Syria to be given to their relatives immediately.

Send appeals to: His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad, President of the Republic, Presidential Palace, Abu Rummaneh, Al-Rashid Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic. Fax: +963 11 332 3410; and to: His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud, Minister of the Interior, Ministry of Interior, Merjeh Circle, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic, Fax: +963 11 222 3428

Maldives

Life imprisonment for publishing Internet articles

Businessmen Mohamed Zaki (left), Ibrahim Moosa Luthfee (centre), Ahmed Ibrahim Didi and a young woman who worked as a personal secretary to Ibrahim Luthfee, Fathimath Nisreen (right), were arrested in January and February 2002, because of their alleged involvement with an Internet publication called Sandhaanu. While Sandhaanu publishes articles which are severely critical of the government, it does not advocate violent political opposition.

Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Moosa Luthfee, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi and Fathimath Nisreen were taken to the Malé Police Headquarters where they were held in solitary confinement for two weeks. They were then transferred to a detention centre on the island of Dhoonidhoo where they were held until May.

On 29 May they were charged with offences including "defamation" and "committing acts hostile to the government". A second hearing took place in June. Throughout the proceedings they were denied access to a lawyer. After the hearing all four were transferred to the prison on the island of Mafushi where they were reportedly kept in solitary confinement in small cells. They had to sleep on a piece of plywood and were denied visits from their families.

In July Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Moosa Luthfee and Ahmed Ibrahim Didi were sentenced to life imprisonment. Fathimath Nisreen was sentenced to 10 years in prison. They are all currently held in Mafushi island prison and no longer in solitary confinement but conditions in the prison are said to be very harsh. Prisoners are at times kept in handcuffs for days and access to health care is severely limited. Visits from relatives are allowed only once a month.

Please write, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience Mohamed Zaki, Ibrahim Moosa Luthfee, Ahmed Ibrahim Didi and Fathimath Nisreen. Raise concerns that their trial was not fair and that they were denied legal representation throughout.

Send appeals to: President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, The President's Palace, Maafannu Theemuge, Malé 2002, Republic of Maldives. Fax: +960 32 55 00

Colombia

Women's human rights defender threatened

Jackeline Rojas has been declared a military target by army-backed paramilitary groups operating in the department of Bolívar. She is the coordinator of the non-governmental organization Organización Femenina Popular (OFP), Popular Women's Organization, which has been working to promote women's human rights in Colombia for 29 years.

Jackeline Rojas says she was warned by a local official on 15 November that the paramilitaries controlling the municipality saw her as a threat. The same official later told other members of the OFP that he had been able to persuade army-backed paramilitaries not to attack Jackeline Rojas for now, but he could not guarantee that she would be safe for long. The OFP has not revealed the identity of the official, as he told them that doing so would lead to his death, the death of Jackeline Rojas and the death of both their families.

The OFP refuses to cooperate with army-backed paramilitary groups, and has therefore faced continual threats and harassment. AI is concerned that these threats mean that other members of the OFP may also be in danger.

Please write, expressing concern for the safety of Jackeline Rojas, her relatives and other members of the OFP. Call for the Colombian authorities to investigate these threats fully and bring those responsible to justice.

Send appeals to: Señor Presidente Álvaro Uribe Vélez, Presidente de la República, Palacio de Nariño, Carrera 8 No.7-26, Santa Fé de Bogotá, Colombia. Fax: +57 1 342 0592