

URGENT ACTION

PROTESTERS AT RISK OF TORTURE AFTER ARRESTS

Five Syrian men involved in protests in the town of Daraya, south-west of Damascus, have been held incommunicado, reportedly by Air Force Intelligence, since their arrests in July and August. They are at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Khairo al-Dabbas, aged 52, was arrested by individuals believed to be members of Air Force Intelligence on 2 July from his friend's home in Daraya. His family told Amnesty International that during his arrest his friend was told that he was being detained for financing the protests in Daraya. They said he would only be released when his son, 21-year-old **Islam al-Dabbas**, who was at that time in hiding, handed himself over and signed a pledge not to participate in future demonstrations. Islam al-Dabbas is one of the organizers of protests in Daraya, which have, by all accounts, been overwhelmingly peaceful, and is renowned for presenting water bottles with flowers to the army in an attempt to deter them from attacking protesters.

On 22 July individuals believed to be members of Air Force Intelligence arrested Islam al-Dabbas, his cousin '**Alaa al-Dabbas**, aged 24, and '**Abd al-Sattar al-Kholani**, aged 32. According to activists from Daraya, Islam and 'Alaa al-Dabbas were arrested during a protest. 'Abd al-Sattar al-Kholani was arrested apparently because he refused to inform Air Force Intelligence where his brother **Majd al-Din al-Kholani**, aged 22, another protest organizer in Daraya, was hiding. Majd al-Din al-Kholani was arrested on 8 August, also, it seems, by Air Force Intelligence.

The authorities have not revealed the men's whereabouts and the families of the five men have been too afraid to ask the authorities for information. Recently released detainees, however, said that all of them, except for Khairo al-Dabbas, are being held in the Air Force Intelligence branch in Mezza, an area of Damascus, and that Islam al-Dabbas, 'Alaa al-Dabbas and Majd al-Din al-Kholani had been severely beaten. They believe Khairo al-Dabbas was recently transferred to another detention centre in Damascus. Amnesty International is concerned that all five men may be prisoners of conscience detained solely for legitimately exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly or because of their family relationship with protesters.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English and French or your own language:

- Expressing concern about reports that Islam al-Dabbas, 'Alaa al-Dabbas and Majd al-Din al-Kholani have been beaten and calling for the alleged abuse to be promptly investigated in a full, independent and impartial manner;
- Expressing concern that all five men (name them) are being held incommunicado and calling for them to be given immediate access to lawyers of their choosing and their families and any medical treatment they need;
- Calling on the authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally if, as Amnesty International fears, they are being detained solely for legitimately exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly or because of their family relationship with protesters, and are therefore prisoners of conscience.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 SEPTEMBER 2011 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 332 3410

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 214 6251

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the beginning of the popular protests in mid-March, the Syrian security forces have arrested thousands of people across the country. Amnesty International has received numerous accounts of detainees being tortured or otherwise ill-treated as well as reports of dozens of deaths in custody, in many cases as an apparent result of such abuses.

According to human rights activists, Air Force Intelligence oversees arrests in Daraya. Along with the other Syrian intelligence services, it regularly detains people suspected of opposing the government and holds them incommunicado for lengthy periods in detention centres that are notorious for torture and other ill-treatment.

Activists from Daraya told Amnesty International that all of those involved in organizing protests went into hiding soon after the outbreak of the popular protests in mid-March, and only go out in public to take part in the protests. Islam al-Dabbas and Majd al-Din al-Kholani, both of whom are students, went into hiding in mid-March and April respectively.

The activists told Amnesty International that when Islam al-Dabbas and 'Alaa al-Dabbas were arrested during the protest on 22 July, Islam was forced to call Majd al-Din al-Kholani and ask him to meet him. Sensing a trap, 'Abd al-Sattar al-Kholani, Majd's brother, refused to let him go and went in his place. He thought it would be safer for him as he rarely participates in protests in Daraya, but he was arrested nonetheless.

The activists said that Majd al-Din al-Kholani was arrested early in the morning on 8 August at a security checkpoint when he was attempting to change his hiding place. They also said that on the same day at around 4pm he was seen in a car near a high school in Daraya, and that his face was swollen and he had clearly been beaten.

Name: Khairo al-Dabbas, Islam al-Dabbas, 'Alaa al-Dabbas, 'Abd al-Sattar al-Kholani, Majd al-Din al-Kholani
Gender m/f: All male

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