

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN ACTIVISTS REMAIN IN DETENTION

Five staff members from the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM) remain held incommunicado at various locations across Syria. They are at risk of torture and other forms of ill-treatment. Eight other detained staff and a visitor to the SCM face charges in military court. All 13 are believed to be prisoners of conscience, held solely for their peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

The director of SCM, **Mazen Darwish**, was arrested along with 13 colleagues and 2 visitors during a raid on the centre on 16 February 2012. Of those arrested, Mazen Darwish, **Hani al-Zitani**, **Abd al-Rahman Hamada**, **Hussein Gharir** and **Mansour al-Omari** remain held incommunicado and their legal status is unclear to Amnesty International. Mazen Darwish and Hussein Gharir are believed to be held at the Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus where they were taken following their arrest. A detainee who was recently released from there claims that Mazen Darwish's health has deteriorated significantly. Mansour al-Omari, Hani al-Zitani and Abd al-Rahman Hamada were last seen at a base in the town of al-Mo'damiya outside the capital, believed to be run by the Fourth Armoured Division under the de facto command of the Syrian president's brother, Maher al-Assad. Three men who were detained at the same base from 19 March 2012 until 22 April have alleged that they and the three SCM staff members were subjected to torture and beatings. No information has been received about Mansour al-Omari, Hani al-Zitani and Abd al-Rahman Hamada since 22 April and there are fears for their safety and well-being.

Eight others, **Sanaa Mohsen**, **Mayada Khalil**, **Razan Ghazzawi**, **Yara Badr**, **Bassam Al-Ahmad**, **Joan Fersso**, **Ayham Ghazoul** and visitor **Hanadi Zahlout** are at liberty pending trial proceedings before a military court in Damascus on 29 May 2012 on charges of "having an illegal recording with a view to distribute banned publications". If convicted and imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience. The other staff members, **Rita Dayoub** and **Maha Assabalani**, along with visitor **Shadi Yazbek**, have since been released and are not known to be facing prosecution.

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

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, and Mansour al-Omari, all held incommunicado since 16 February 2012;
- Urge the Syrian authorities to ensure that Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, and Mansour al-Omari are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with their families and a lawyer of their choice, and provided with all necessary medical treatment;
- Call for the dropping of all charges against the other eight related solely to their peaceful activities for, or links with, the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM.)

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 JULY 2012 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street
 Damascus,
 Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
 Ibrahim al-Shaar, Ministry of Interior,
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 211 9578 (keep trying)
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 6253 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellence

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 67/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/019/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mazen Darwish is the director of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM). The centre was closed in 2009 by Syrian authorities and was reopened later without government approval. It has since been issuing reports related to violations against journalists and the press and undue restrictions on freedom of expression. Amnesty International has documented the rise of violations against human rights activists and defenders by the Syrian authorities since the beginning of pro-reform protests in Syria in February 2011.

Pro-reform demonstrations began sporadically in February 2011 but became larger and more frequent after the first killings of demonstrators the following month. Initially largely peaceful, the Syrian authorities responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. In the year since then, although peaceful demonstrations have continued, the unrest has turned increasingly violent, with armed opposition groups, many loosely under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) carrying out attacks mainly against Syrian security forces. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 9,200 people reported to have died or been killed during or in connection with the protests and related unrest since mid-March 2011. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting soldiers who have taken up arms against the government.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested since protests broke out and many, if not most, are believed to have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has the names of more than 360 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see *"I wanted to die": Syria's torture survivors speak out* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>. Amnesty International has also received many reports of individuals apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide families with any information concerning the fate of individuals, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by security forces.

Despite the Syrian government's acceptance on 27 March 2012 of the six-point plan drawn up by the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League on Syria, Kofi Annan, and the ceasefire agreement of 12 April, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance. Amnesty International has previously documented human rights violations and abuses against injured people and health professionals in selected Syrian hospitals. For more information, please see Amnesty International's report *Health crisis: Syrian government targets the wounded and health workers* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/059/2011/en>.

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic and widespread human rights violations which amount to crimes against humanity, and has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as an international arms embargo on Syria, and for an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

Go to the interactive Eyes on Syria map (www.eyesonsyria.org) to see where human rights violations are being committed in Syria, and Amnesty International's global activism to seek justice.

Name: Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, Mansour al-Omari, Sanaa Mohsen, Mayada Khalil, Razan Ghazzawi, Yara Badr, Bassam Al-Ahmad, Joan Fersso, Ayham Ghazoul, Hanadi Zahlout, Rita Dayoub, Maha Assabalani and Shadi Yazbek

Gender m/f: Mazen Darwish (M), Hani al-Zitani (M), Abd al-Rahman Hamada (M), Hussein Gharir (M), Mansour al-Omari (M), Sanaa Mohsen (F), Mayada Khalil (F), Razan Ghazzawi (F), Yara Badr (F), Bassam Al-Ahmad (M), Joan Fersso (M), Ayham Ghazoul (M), Hanadi Zahlout (F), Rita Dayoub (F), Maha Assabalani (F) and Shadi Yazbek (M)

Further information on UA: 67/12 Index: MDE 24/047/2012 Issue Date: 22 May 2012