

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 24/05/91
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Date: 18 July 1991

MEDICAL CONCERN

@Riad al-Turk
£SYRIA

Amnesty International is seriously concerned by the situation of Riad al-Turk, a 60 year old prisoner of conscience who has been held incommunicado for over ten years and has never been charged or tried. He suffers from diabetes with a number of serious complications affecting the kidneys, eyes and cardiovascular system. On several occasions throughout his ten-year detention he has been hospitalized after entering a coma, most recently in March 1991. He has also been subjected to torture and is reported to have suffered a loss of hearing as a result. There is no indication that the Syrian authorities intend to bring him to trial and Amnesty International fears that he could continue to be held for an indefinite period. It is urgently appealing for his unconditional release.

Background

Riad al-Turk is a lawyer by profession and was First Secretary of the banned Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB). The CPPB was founded in 1973 under his leadership. Since its foundation the party has faced periodic suppression and the arrest of its members because of its opposition to the policies of the present Syrian government and especially to the Syrian intervention in Lebanon since 1976. Riad al-Turk was arrested in Damascus on 28 October 1980. He is married to a doctor and has two children, none of whom have seen him since his arrest over ten years ago. His wife, Dr Asmah al-Faisal, was arrested in October 1980 and held hostage while the authorities sought to detain him. Following his arrest, she remained in detention for two years until her release from Qatana Women's Prison in Damascus at the end of 1982.

Despite his serious ill-health, Riad al-Turk continues to be held in the Military Interrogation Branch, the detention centre in Damascus where he has been held incommunicado since his arrest in 1980. He is reported to have been severely tortured on a number of occasions during interrogation. In early 1981, shortly after his arrest, he was admitted to the intensive care unit at al-Muwassat Hospital in Damascus for urgent treatment following torture. On a subsequent occasion he is reported to have been in an extremely poor state following severe torture in December 1983 and at the end of 1984 he was reported to have sustained fractures to an arm and leg and to have suffered hearing loss.

At various periods during his detention there have been reports that he was without proper medical treatment for his diabetes. He suffers from renal insufficiency and is reported to have suffered acute kidney failure on a number of occasions. He was first reported to have been

admitted to hospital with kidney failure in January 1982 when he was admitted to intensive care in al-Mezze Military Hospital in Damascus. In December 1987 Riad al-Turk was admitted to al-Mezze Military Prison Hospital after entering a coma. He remained comatose for 25 days after which he was returned to solitary confinement.

In 1988 it was reported to Amnesty International that the Syrian authorities had established a committee to consider his case in view of his health situation (he is said to have required dialysis in mid-1988). However, despite the gravity and the progressive nature of his condition, he remains in detention with no indication of imminent release.

In March 1991 Riad al-Turk was again hospitalized after entering coma. He remained in hospital for two weeks before being returned to the Military Interrogation Branch. He is said still to have been in a very poor state when returned to the detention centre and his condition continues to cause grave anxiety. In addition to renal insufficiency, he suffers from related hypertension and his eyesight is also said to have deteriorated.

It seems clear that his diabetes has not been adequately controlled and Amnesty International is concerned at the likely prognosis. The organization has appealed for his release on numerous occasions and is once again appealing to the Syrian authorities to release Riad al-Turk as a matter of urgency. He has never used or advocated violence and has been held for ten and a half years and deprived of all rights solely for the expression of his opinion.

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To: Medical professionals
From: Medical Office / Research Department - Middle East
Date: 18 July 1991

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Riad al-Turk
SYRIA**

Keywords

Theme: ill-health/long-term imprisonment/detention without trial/incommunicado detention

Summary

Riad al-Turk, adopted as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International and now aged 60, has been imprisoned in Damascus for over 10 years without charge or trial. He suffers from diabetes with serious complications including renal insufficiency and hypertension and has been hospitalized after entering coma on several occasions. He is also said to have become deaf following torture. He has been held in incommunicado detention since his arrest in 1980 and Amnesty International is now gravely concerned by his situation.

Recommended Actions

Letters are requested from medical professionals to the government authorities listed below:

- expressing serious concern for Riad al-Turk, who is detained in the Military Interrogation Branch in Damascus and suffers from a number of serious health problems resulting from his diabetes and is also said to have suffered hearing loss
- note that he has become comatose on several occasions and express your concern that his diabetes has not been properly controlled during his imprisonment and has resulted in serious consequences for him
- further expressing your concern that he has been held in incommunicado detention since arrest in 1980 although never charged and brought to trial
- urge that Riad al-Turk is immediately and unconditionally released without further delay on the grounds that he has been detained solely for expression of his opinions and has not used or advocated violence
- ask what medical attention is available to him and what has been recommended by doctors regarding his treatment

- note that in 1988 there were reports that his release was being considered on grounds of ill-health and ask whether his release is currently under consideration
- note that it has now been ten years since he has seen his family and urge in the strongest possible terms that he is granted access to them as a gesture of humanity

N.B: Given the failure to release Riad al-Turk despite the many concerns present and the many appeals made over several years, medical groups are further requested to arrange some of the following:

- 1) Up to three letters from each group could be sent directly to Syrian diplomatic representatives in your country raising the above points.
- 2) Where there exists a Syrian embassy, medical groups are further asked to seek an appointment at the embassy to discuss Riad al-Turk's continued imprisonment. It is suggested that medical groups who are able to do this should contact the Syria coordinator in their section to discuss a joint visit to the embassy.
- 3) Riad al-Turk is a lawyer. All medical groups are asked to send a small number of letters to the Arab Lawyers' Union outlining his health situation and asking them whether they are able to intercede with the Syrian authorities in an attempt to secure his release. The address of the Arab Lawyers' Union is:

Arab Lawyers' Union
13 Itehad el Mouhameen St.
Ex. Toulombat St.
Garden City
Cairo
Egypt

Please try to publicize Riad al-Turk's case and to elicit appeals on his behalf from national medical bodies.

Addresses

His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
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Syrian Arab Republic
**Telegrams: President al-Assad,
Damascus, Syria**

Telexes: PRESPL 419160 sy

His Excellency 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam
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His Excellency Muhammad Harba
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COPIES TO:

His Excellency Dr Iyad al-Shatti
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