

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

AI Index: MDE 24/07/93

Distr: UA/SC

UA 292/93 Fear of torture/legal concern

26 August 1993

SYRIA: Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman (female)
Asia Mahmud (female)
Khadija Dib (female)

Fadwa Mahmud (female)
Tuhama Ma'ruf (female)
Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari (female)

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman, a 34-year-old former prisoner of conscience, who has been held in incommunicado detention since her arrest nearly three months ago and whose current whereabouts are unknown. The organization is also concerned that Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman and the five other women political detainees named above may be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their conscientiously held beliefs.

Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman was arrested on 8 June 1993 at her home in Kafr al-Soussa, Damascus, where she lives with her sister and elderly mother. She is being held in incommunicado detention. In the past political suspects in Syria held in such detention have been subjected to torture and ill-treatment and so the organization fears that she is at risk of being subjected to similar treatment. According to Amnesty International's information, Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman may have been suspected of having links with the Party for Communist Action (PCA), an unauthorized political party. She has previously been held at least twice in connection with this party, from 1979 to 1980 and subsequently from 1986 until the end of 1991. On both occasions she was detained without charge or trial, under state of emergency legislation in force for over 30 years, and had no access to legal assistance.

The five other women detainees named above are currently held in Duma Women's Prison in Damascus and are said to be in the process of being tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), together with more than 500 other political detainees and prisoners of conscience facing charges of membership or links with various unauthorized political parties. These five are believed to have been interrogated by the SSSC prosecutor, but Amnesty International does not know if any charges have been brought against them and whether they have been granted legal assistance.

One of the five, Asia Mahmud, was arrested in December 1992 or January 1993, reportedly in connection with the Kurdish Workers Party. The other four are all being held on suspicion of membership of or having links with the PCA. Khadija Dib, a 34-year-old student of French literature and former prisoner of conscience, has been held since March 1992. She had previously been detained at least twice in connection with the PCA, in 1984 and February 1992. Her husband, Qais Darwish who has been in detention since 1984, is currently being tried by the SSSC, together with more than 250 others charged with membership or links with the PCA. At least 34 of these defendants have recently been sentenced to lengthy prison

terms ranging from 3 to 15 years. Fadwa Mahmud, a 33-year-old mother of two children, was also arrested in March 1992, apparently for having had contact with Khadija Dib. The remaining two detainees, Tuhama Ma'ruf, a medical student aged about 26, and Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari, a 29-year-old former student of English, were arrested in December 1992 and February 1993 respectively. Doha 'Ashur al-'Askari had been living in hiding since 1986 when the authorities began to seek her arrest in connection with the PCA. Her brother, Usama 'Ashur al-'Askari, is among the 250 or so being tried in connection with the PCA. He has been in detention since 1982.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern that Hassiba 'Abd al-Rahman is being held in incommunicado detention and seeking information as to her whereabouts;
- seeking assurances that she and the other women detainees named above are being treated humanely and are given access to family, lawyers and medical attention, if necessary;
- expressing concern that all six detainees may be prisoners of conscience and urging that if that is the case that they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- asking for details about the charges and evidence against them as well as the dates and places of any pending trial procedures.

APPEALS TO

1) His Excellency
President Hafez al-Assad
Presidential Palace
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President Al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 munjed sy

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) His Excellency
Muhammad Harba
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 411018 AFIRS SY

Salutation: Your Excellency

3) His Excellency 'Abdallah Talaba
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Naser Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascas, Syria
Telexes : 411018 AFIRS SY

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 October 1993.