

25 June 2002

Further information on UA 226/01 (MDE 24/029/2001, 7 September 2001) and follow-ups (MDE 24/030/2001, 11 September 2001), (MDE 24/033/2001, 20 September 2001), (MDE 24/010/2002, 4 April 2002) and (MDE 24/011/2002, 19 April 2002) - Prisoner of Conscience/Unfair Trial/ Ill-Health New concern: Ill-treatment

SYRIARIad Seif (m), Parliamentarian, 54
Hassan Sa'dun (m), Retired teacher
'Aref Dalilah (m), Economist, in his early 60s
Walid al-Bunni (m), Physician, 38
Kamal al-Labwani (m), Physician, 44
Habib Saleh (m), Businessperson, 52
Habib 'Isa (m), Lawyer, 55
Fawaz Tello (m), Engineer

All the detainees named above, except Riad Seif, are being tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC). One of the men has allegedly been ill-treated in prison. Amnesty International considers their trials to be grossly unfair and calls for their immediate release as prisoners of conscience.

On 24 June, Habib Saleh was sentenced to three years in prison on charges of "opposing the objectives of the revolution" and "inciting racial and sectarian strife" by the SSSC.

'Aref Dalilah has reportedly been ill-treated and beaten in prison. During a hearing before the SSSC on 3 June, he reportedly presented a blood-stained handkerchief as a proof of the ill-treatment he had suffered at the hands of the Security Forces. He has also reportedly not yet received the medical treatment he requires for deep vein thrombosis. (See update MDE 24/011/2002; 19/04/2002)

Habib Saleh, Habib 'Isa, Fawaz Tello and Kamal al-Labwani are no longer on hunger strike.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SSSC is placed outside the ordinary criminal justice system and is accountable only to the Minister of Interior, who is by delegation the Martial Law Governor, in charge of overseeing the implementation of the State of Emergency Law. The SSSC's powers are limited to the courtroom and do not extend to control or supervision of the activities of the various security forces and the procedures followed in relation to arrests, detention and treatment of political suspects. The SSSC is also unable to ensure that those acquitted are actually released.

The SSSC's lack of independence and impartiality is compounded by two factors: its verdicts are not subject to appeal, and it is not bound by the rules of the Code of Criminal Procedures. SSSC trials are also unfair because defendants have restricted access to lawyers; judges, especially the President of the Court, have been granted wide discretionary powers, and "confessions" allegedly extracted under duress or torture are accepted as evidence.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

-expressing concern at the trial and sentencing of Habib Saleh, who is being held solely for the peaceful expression of his political opinion;

-calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Habib Saleh, Riad Seif, Hassan Sa'dun, 'Aref Dalilah, Walid al-Bunni, Kamal al-Labwani, Habib 'Isa, and Fawaz Tello as prisoners of conscience;
 -seeking assurance that the men are not being ill-treated and have access to their families and any medical assistance they may require;
 -demanding an impartial and independent investigation into the allegations of ill-treatment of 'Aref Dalilah;
 -urging the authorities to provide 'Aref Dalilah with any medical treatment he may need as a result of the ill-health he has suffered in detention;
 -calling for the procedures of the State Security Court (SSSC), to conform with the requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
 President Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 419160 prespl sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
 Nabil al-Khatib
 Ministry of Justice
 Al-Nasr Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Damascus, Syria
e-mail: moj@net.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency
 Maj-Gen Ali Hammud
 Minister of the Interior
 Ministry of the Interior
 Merjeh Circle
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY
Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES 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 6 August 2002.