

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/020/2003

24 June 2003

UA 185/03      Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/detention without charge/possible prisoner of conscience

SYRIA      'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri (m), aged 31

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'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri has been held incommunicado and without charge since 23 February. He was reportedly detained for accessing Internet sites related to politics in Syria. He is at risk of torture or ill-treatment in detention. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Abdel Rahman Shaghouri, from the village of Birajam, was arrested by security personnel at a checkpoint between the town of Qunaytra and the capital Damascus on 23 February. No warrant was issued for his arrest. On the same day, secret police agents reportedly entered his house and confiscated his computer, fax, CDs and other computer-related items. He has not been charged with any offence, but it is thought his detention is linked to his accessing Internet sites giving political information about Syria (such as [www.thisissyria.net](http://www.thisissyria.net)).

It is thought 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri is being held at the Military Security Branch prison in Damascus. He has been denied access to a lawyer and to his relatives. Political detainees held by military security personnel are routinely tortured and ill-treated in detention.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Internet access in Syria is carefully monitored by the authorities and websites deemed undesirable for political or moral reasons are censored. The cost of internet use is, in any case, beyond the means of most Syrians. Unfettered access can only be achieved by dialling internet service providers in neighbouring countries. Ironically, President Bashar al-Assad was formerly head of the Syrian Computer Society.

#### **RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, French, Arabic or your own language:**

- expressing concern that 'Abdel Rahman Shaghouri has been held incommunicado and without charge since 23 February;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a possible prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his legitimate right to freedom of expression;
- calling on the authorities to publicly confirm his whereabouts, and to guarantee that he is not tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- urging the authorities to allow him immediate and unrestricted access to his family, lawyer and whatever medical care he may require.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency  
President Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Telegram:**      **President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria**

**Telex:**            **419160 prespl sy**

**Fax:** + 96311 332 3410  
**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

**Fax:** + 96311 222 3428

**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 5 August 2003.