

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 110/04 (MDE 24/019/2004, 16 March 2004) Mass arrests/unlawful killings/torture and ill-treatment

SYRIA

Hundreds of Syrian Kurds

At least 40 Syrian Kurds, including children, have reportedly been killed, most of them by the security forces, since violent clashes at a 12 March football match. Hundreds of people, including children, remain in detention. Most are held incommunicado and thereby at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

On 13 March, police apparently attacked mourners attending the funerals of those killed. This led to two days of protests and rioting in various towns in north-eastern Syria, including al-Malikiya, al-Qahtaniya and 'Amouda. In al-Malikiya the security forces reportedly fired at protesters who were throwing stones at the Military Intelligence and State Security buildings: 16-year-old Hussein Nouri and six-year-old Badry Shaheen were shot dead. Protesters were also reportedly shot and injured in al-Qahtaniya. Around 13 March Kurdish protesters reportedly beat up the head of the 'Amouda police station. He later died of his injuries.

Amnesty International has received the names of hundreds of Syrian Kurds, including children, who remain in detention. Among them is 16-year-old Mas'oud Ja'fr, from al-Qahtaniya. Although some 500 – 600 were reportedly released around 19 March, the whereabouts of up to 2,500 people reportedly still in detention remain unknown, and they are apparently still held incommunicado, without access to lawyers or relatives, putting them at grave risk of torture and ill-treatment. Some, including children, have reportedly been tortured: 17-year-old Kane'e Muhammad Ramadan was apparently arrested at the football match, and tortured with electric shocks until he lost consciousness. He was held for nine days. An adult man, Moussa 'Abdel Fatah Shaheen, had to be hospitalised after he was tortured in custody. He had been arrested at a protest in al-Qahtaniya. Some reports suggest that many of the injured are effectively being held in detention in government hospitals, said to be surrounded by security forces.

Hundreds of Syrian Kurds were also arrested in Damascus. Dozens of students from the university were arrested, apparently after peaceful demonstrations against the arrests and killings of Syrian Kurds. Many were released on 20 February but at least 18 remain in detention, including Fahima Asko (f); Sourya Amko (f); 'Ali Huseini (f); Mizgin Huseini (f); Nasiba Huseini (f); Nizar Kousa (m); Jawdan Huseini (m); Jawan Hasse (m); Nawras Moura'i (m); Sipan Sayda (m); Sarteep Youssef (m); and Darchin Huchik (m). Many of the Syrian Kurdish students have been expelled from the university over allegations that they broke the university's code governing participation in unlawful political events and distributing leaflets.

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

- expressing concern at reports that at least 40 Syrian Kurds have been killed in apparent deliberate and arbitrary killings or use of excessive force by the security forces;
- calling for an independent and impartial investigation into the killings, and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice in accordance with international standards for fair trial;
- asking to be told the names of all those arrested, the reasons for their arrest, and where those still in custody are now held;
- expressing particular concern about the reports that children have been detained, and reminding the authorities that, under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Syria is a state party, "The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time";

- expressing grave concern at the reports that detainees have been tortured, and urging the authorities to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into these allegations, seeking assurance that the perpetrators will be brought to justice;
- seeking assurances that all detainees will be treated humanely, in accordance with international standards on the treatment of detainees;
- asking that all detainees be given prompt access to their families, legal assistance and any necessary medical care;
- expressing concern that many of those detained appear to be held solely for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs or their ethnic identity, and calling for them to be released immediately and unconditionally unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
President
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 332 3410

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria

Telexes: 411016 AFIRS SY

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Nizar al-Assasi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
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Syrian Arab Republic

Fax: + 963 11 222 3428

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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 14 May 2004.