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News Flash

Syria: Release prisoners of conscience al-Turk and al-Humsi immediately

Amnesty International called on the Syrian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release leading opposition figure Riad al-Turk and independent member of parliament Mamun al-Humsi, and asked for assurances they are well treated in custody and allowed immediate access to medical care and to their families and lawyers.

The human rights organization considers Riad al-Turk and Mamun al-Humsi prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for their peaceful expression of their political opinions. The organization is also concerned about their health.

Riad al-Turk, 71, who has diabetes as well as a heart condition, was arrested by the security forces on 1 September. He was apparently receiving emergency medical treatment at the time, in the city of Tartus. It is not known where he is held.

*al-Turk had been detained as a prisoner of conscience from 1980 to 1998 because of his opposition to the Syrian government. He was held without charge or trial, mostly incommunicado, in the Military Interrogation Branch (*Far' al-Tahqiq al-'Askari*) in Damascus. He was eventually released under an amnesty declared by the late President Hafiz al-Assad in May 1998.*

Independent member of parliament Mamun al-Humsi was arrested on 9 August, two days after he began a hunger strike in protest at

official corruption and the massive powers wielded by the security forces. He is at risk of torture in custody, especially given his criticism of the Syrian security forces.

Police took him to 'Adra Prison, where he is now held. He has been allowed access to his medication, but denied transfer to hospital as requested by the doctor who examined him. He has been charged with offences including "insulting the constitution, opposing the government and engagement in intelligence with foreign quarters." These offences, which are tried by the Supreme State Security Court, carry sentences of up to 15 years' imprisonment. Amnesty International learnt that relatives and friends of al-Humsi were summoned for interrogation reportedly to exert pressure on him.

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