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News Flash

Syria: Amnesty International welcomes the release of political prisoners

Amnesty International today welcomed the news reports that the Syrian Government has ordered the release of 600 political prisoners.

"For many years Amnesty International has been campaigning for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience, fair trials for political prisoners, and investigations into all cases of 'disappearances'," the human rights organization said. "In 1994, and 1997 Amnesty International had submitted memoranda to the Syrian Government with names of hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience."

Following the election of president Bashar al-Assad earlier this year, Amnesty International issued a statement calling for "the new Syrian Government to re-examine the case of every person detained for political or security offences. The human rights organization urged the Syrian authorities to release, after so many years, all those detained for their beliefs, all those who have been detained for years without trials, and all others unless they are given fair trials according to international standards.

In the last decade, the Syrian authorities have released thousands of political prisoners in presidential amnesties or at the expiry of their prison terms. However a recent Amnesty International report said that at least 1500 political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, remain in detention. They include Abd al-Aziz al-Khayer, a prisoner of conscience sentenced to 22 years in connection with the unauthorized Party for Communist Action.

Amnesty International has the names of scores of prisoners of conscience and thousands of political prisoners, mainly from the Muslim Brotherhood, who have been detained or "disappeared" since the early 1980s in Syria.

"We hope that this is just the start, and the release of all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners who have been detained for years without trial will follow," Amnesty International said.

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