

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/035/2005

01 June 2005

Further Information on UA 131/05 (MDE 24/027/2005, 19 May 2005) Prisoner of conscience/torture and ill-treatment

SYRIA **Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi (m) aged 48, Kurdish imam and Islamic scholar**

Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi reportedly died on 30 May from injuries sustained during torture. He was allegedly tortured while detained at an unknown location by Military Intelligence personnel, and was admitted to the Tishrin Military Hospital in the capital Damascus on 27 May, where he later died. Amnesty International has no further information at present on the circumstances of his death.

Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi's body was handed over to his family on 1 June and is due to be taken to his home town Qamishli (in a predominantly Syrian Kurdish area in north eastern Syria) for burial on the same day. Ten cars containing Military Intelligence personnel reportedly accompanied relatives taking Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi's body on the journey from Damascus to Qamishli.

Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, a religious scholar and an outspoken member of the Syrian Kurdish community, "disappeared" after leaving the Centre for Islamic Studies in Damascus on 10 May. The Syrian authorities had denied that they were holding him.

He was well known for his criticism of violence and terrorism, and had recently called for reforms in Syria and for more dialogue between religious groups. In February and March 2005 he travelled to Norway, Brussels and Germany, apparently in connection with his work on building relations between the EU and the Kurdish community. During his visit he was interviewed by several TV channels.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At least six Kurds have reportedly died as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody since March 2004. More than 2,000 people, almost all of them Kurds, are believed to have been arrested in the wake of March 2004 clashes (see Amnesty International report, *Syria: Kurds in the Arab Republic one year after the March 2004 events*, MDE 24/002/2005, March 2005). Most of these were held incommunicado at unknown locations, and about 100 remain in detention in spite of the Presidential Amnesty issued at the end of March 2005 when 312 Kurds were ordered released. Amnesty International has documented widespread reports of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the death in custody of Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, which is apparently as a result of torture he suffered during his detention;
- seeking clarification as to whether an autopsy has been conducted on the body of Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, and if so urging that the results be made public;
- calling for an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the events leading to Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi's death in custody and into allegations that he was tortured;
- seeking assurance that anyone found guilty of torture will be brought to justice according to international standards for fair trial;

- reminding the authorities that torture is, as stated by the UN's Special Rapporteur on Torture, "most frequently practised during incommunicado detention [which] should be made illegal, and persons held incommunicado should be released without delay";
- reminding the authorities that as a state party to the Convention Against Torture, Syria is obliged to review all of its legislation and practices in line with the requirements of the Convention, and ensure that all its provisions are fully implemented.

APPEALS TO:

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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.