

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL ACTIVIST HELD INCOMMUNICADO IN SYRIA

Ahmed Mustafa Ben-Mohammed, usually known by his pen name of Pir Rostom, a male Syrian political activist, is being held incommunicado at an unknown location. He is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

A source in Syria has reported to Amnesty International that **Pir Rostom**, aged 46, was arrested on 5 November in the city of Aleppo, northern Syria, apparently by Political Security forces. He had returned to his home in the town of 'Afreen, Aleppo province, on 26 October, after living in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, where he had lived for two years.

The authorities have not told Pir Rostom's family where he is being held, and have not revealed why he was arrested or whether he will be charged. At the time of his arrest Pir Rostom was suffering from a stomach ulcer and a kidney infection, both requiring regular medical supervision and medication.

Pir Rostom is a member of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, an unauthorized political party which calls for the realization of the rights of the Kurdish minority in Syria within the framework of national unity. The party is a member of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), an unauthorized umbrella body of opposition groups in Syria. He is also a writer and has published four story collections in the Kurdish language.

Pir Rostom was previously among a number of people arrested for taking part in a public meeting of the DDDNC on 1 December 2007. He was arrested on 9 December 2007, but released without charge two days later.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities immediately to reveal Pir Rostom's whereabouts;
- Urging them to ensure that he will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Calling on the authorities to immediately allow him visits from his family, a lawyer of his choosing, and any medical treatment he may require;
- Urging the authorities to release Pir Rostom unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and tried promptly in proceedings which meet fair trial standards.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 JANUARY 2010 TO:

President

Bashar al-Assad
 Presidential Palace
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Major Sa'id Mohamed Samour
 Ministry of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs
 Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus
 Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 7620
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Torture and other ill-treatment are widespread in Syria's detention and interrogation centres, particularly during periods of incommunicado detention "Confessions" extracted under duress are systematically used as evidence in Syrian courts, and the defendants' claims that they have been tortured are almost never investigated.

Freedom of expression and association is strictly controlled in Syria, aided by state of emergency laws which have been in force since 1964. Only the Ba'ath Party and some parties linked to it are officially recognized as political parties in Syria and human rights organizations are not authorized to operate. Peaceful critics of the Syrian authorities, members of human rights organizations and others suspected of being political opponents risk arrest, harassment and persecution.

At least 50 people were detained in connection with the DDDNC meeting on 1 December 2007. Thirty-eight of those detained, including Pir Rostom, were released without charge, while 12 are still serving two-and-a-half-year prison sentences. The 12 were convicted by the Damascus Criminal Court on 29 October 2008 of "weakening national sentiment" and "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which could affect the morale of the country". All of the 12 members were arrested between 9 December 2007 and 5 February 2008 and initially held incommunicado at the State Security branch in Damascus, where at least eight of them were beaten. They were punched in the face, kicked and slapped and were forced to sign false "confessions". Amnesty International considers all of them to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

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