

PUBLIC

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3 June 2005

Further Information on UA 140/05 (MDE 24/033/2005, 25 May 2005) - Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/legal concern

SYRIA **Muhammad Ra'dun (m), aged 56, lawyer and Head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights – Syria (AOHR-S)**
Nizar Ristnawi (m), founding member of the AOHR-S

Muhammad Ra'dun was charged on 30 May by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) with "disseminating false information" and with "involvement in an illegal organisation of an international nature". If convicted, he faces more than three years in prison. There has been no news of Nizar Ristnawi since his arrest on 18 April, and Amnesty International believes he is in grave danger.

The charges against Muhammad Ra'dun are apparently connected with statements on human rights made by the organisation he heads, the Arab Organisation for Human Rights-Syria (AOHR-S). He is reportedly still held at the Political Security branch in the capital, Damascus.

Muhammad Ra'dun is facing an unfair trial before the SSSC, whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants have restricted access to lawyers; "confessions" are admissible as evidence even when they are alleged to have been extracted under torture; judges have wide discretion in sentencing, and convicted prisoners cannot appeal. The UN Human Rights Committee stated in 2001 that the SSSC's procedures are incompatible with the provisions of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, to which Syria is a state party.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Only government-sanctioned organizations can operate in Syria, and human rights defenders have for decades been subjected to arbitrary arrest and prolonged detention, torture and ill-treatment, unfair trials and restriction of their movements. The arrests of Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun appear to be part of a sudden increase in the harassment of human rights defenders and curtailment of their activities. Sheikh Muhammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi, an *imam* (Muslim cleric) and prominent member of the Kurdish community, died on 30 May apparently as a result of torture while detained incommunicado by Military Intelligence. He was a well-known critic of violence and terrorism and had recently called for reforms in Syria. For details see UA 131/05, MDE 24/027/2005, and follow-up.

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

- calling on the authorities to release Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun immediately, as they are prisoners of conscience detained solely for their peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
- calling for the charges against Muhammad Ra'dun to be dropped, and reminding the authorities that if brought to trial, he is entitled to a fair hearing in line with international standards for fair trial;
- expressing concern that Nizar Ristnawi is held incommunicado in a secret location, and urging the authorities to disclose his whereabouts immediately;
- asking that both men be allowed regular visits from their families, lawyers of their choice and any medical attention they may require;
- seeking assurances that Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun will not be tortured or ill-treated;
- reminding the authorities that Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens, and that in detaining Nizar Ristnawi and Muhammad Ra'dun, the authorities are breaching their

obligations under the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which affirms the right to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19).

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency President Bashar al-Assad
President of the Republic
Presidential Palace
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Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency General Ghazi Kan'an
Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax + 963 11 222 3428
Email: mi@net.sy or admin@civilaffair-moi.gov.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
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Email: moj@net.sy
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 15 July 2005.