

PUBLIC

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26 April 2004

UA 155/04 Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture

SYRIA	Muhannad al-Dabas (m)]	
	Wa'il 'Azzuz (m)]	
	Shadi Abu-Fakhr (m)]	
	Dhahayr Abu-Latif (m)]	
	'Umar 'Abdalla (m)]	students from the University of Damascus and
	Khaled al-'Asrawi (m)]	University of Aleppo
	Muhammad 'Arab (m)]	
	Basil Dayyub (m)]	
	Mihyar Khashrum (m)]	
	Naser Babesni (m)]	
	Mustafa al-Yusuf (m)]	
	Moris 'Ayiqq (m)]	

The 12 students named above were arrested by the security forces in the capital, Damascus, on 24 April. They are reportedly held incommunicado at the Department of Political Security in Damascus. Amnesty International is concerned that they may be tortured while held incommunicado, and considers them prisoners of conscience, held solely for their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association.

Their arrest is apparently related to a 25 February sit-down protest organized by students at the University of Damascus against new government policies ending employment of engineering graduates by the state. After the protest several students, including some of the above, were dismissed from the University and their names were struck off the register of the National Students' Union. Their arrest may also be related to another student protest at the University of Damascus following the brutal government suppression of Kurds following clashes between Arab and Kurdish football fans in March this year.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 25th February 2004, 10 students from Aleppo University were arrested because of a peaceful demonstration they took part in, on the university grounds. Around 400 students took part in the demonstration, all from the Faculty of Engineering. The demonstration was held as the students objected to Legislative Decree No. 6 (2004), which states that the government will no longer automatically employ engineering graduates. The students wished to present letters to the President of the University calling upon all students and academics at the university to stand together to protect students' rights.

After 45 minutes of peaceful demonstration, around 200 police officers and members of the student Ba'ath party disturbed the demonstration, beating the demonstrators and taking mobile phones and other personal belongings from them. Criminal security agents detained all of the students for five hours, on university premises, before they were allowed to leave. A number of students had suffered injuries, and went to the University hospital, where they were denied treatment. The *Al-Razee* public hospital also refused to treat them. There have been unconfirmed reports that 22 students may be expelled from the university.

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

- calling for the students (naming them) to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they appear to be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- seeking assurances that the students will be well treated, and not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to allow them immediate and unrestricted access to their families and lawyers.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad
President
Presidential Palace
Abu Rummaneh
al-Rashid Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: President al-Assad, Damascus, Syria
Fax: + 963 11 332 3410
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Major General 'Ali Hammud
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of Interior
Merjeh Circle
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Telegram: Interior Minister, Damascus, Syria
Fax: + 963 11 222 3428
Telex: 411016 AFIRS 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 7 June 2004.