

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/040/2004

17 May 2004

Further Information on UA 155/04 (AI Index: MDE 24/038/2004, 26 April 2004) Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture and new concern: Fear of unfair trial

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

Nine of the students named above were released on 9 May. Mohammad 'Arab and Mohammad al-Dabas were not released, reportedly because they refused to sign a commitment not to take part in any activities except for those organised by the pro-government student organisation. They are still detained incommunicado at the Department of Political Security in Damascus, where they are at risk of torture.

Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association. The other students were told on their release that these two are likely to be tried before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), whose trials Amnesty International considers grossly unfair.

At least seven of those who were released were reportedly beaten during their arrest, and tortured and ill-treated in custody. They were apparently beaten and kicked, sometimes while tied to a frame, and subjected to the 'flying carpet', in which the victim is strapped to a piece of wood shaped like a human body and then beaten or given electric shocks.

Muhammad 'Arab, who was born in Aleppo, in north-western Syria, in 1976, is a fourth year student in Damascus University, studying electrical engineering and philosophy. Mohammad al-Dabas, who is 27 and is from Suweyda, is a student in the Department of Medicine in Aleppo University.

The 11 students - six from Damascus University and five from Aleppo University - were arrested by officers of Political Security ('*amn al-siyassi*') Damascus Branch at a cafeteria near Damascus University. Some of the students from Aleppo University were among dozens expelled after they took part in a peaceful protest, held at the university on 25 February, against a new law ending the provision of guaranteed employment for graduating engineering students.

It is now known that Moris 'Ayiqq was not arrested.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SSSC's lack of independence and impartiality is compounded by two factors: its verdicts are not subject to appeal, and it is not bound by the rules of the Code of Criminal Procedures. SSSC trials are also unfair

because defendants have restricted access to lawyers; judges, especially the President of the Court, have been granted wide discretionary powers, and confessions allegedly extracted under duress or torture are accepted as evidence.

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

- welcoming the release of Wa'il 'Azzuz, Shadi Abu-Fakhr, Dhahayr Abu-Latif, 'Umar 'Abdalla, Khaled al-'Asrawi, Basil Dayyub, Mihyar Khashrum, Naser Babesni and Mustafa al-Yusuf, but expressing deep concern that they were reportedly beaten during arrest, and tortured in custody;
- calling for Mohammad 'Arab and Mohammad al-Dabas to be released immediately and unconditionally, as prisoners of conscience held solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- seeking assurances that Mohammad 'Arab and Mohammad al-Dabas will be well treated, and not tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to allow Mohammad 'Arab and Mohammad al-Dabas immediate and unrestricted access to their families and lawyers, and also any medical treatment they may need.

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 28 June 2004.