

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/045/2005

1 July 2005

Further Information on UA 139/05 (MDE 24/032/2005, 25 May 2005) and follow-up (MDE 24/038/2005, 3 June 2005) - Prisoner of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of torture and ill-treatment/unfair trial

SYRIA **'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), age 55, journalist and member of Jamal al-Atassi Forum**

'Ali al-'Abdullah's trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) is scheduled to begin on 30 October 2005. He has already been in custody for over six weeks, mainly held incommunicado, which puts him at grave risk of torture, and will be kept in prison at least until the start of his trial. He is said to be in solitary confinement in 'Adra Prison, near the capital, Damascus.

He is charged with "promoting an illegal organisation," believed to be the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which is banned in Syria. If convicted, he faces over three years in prison.

'Ali al-'Abdullah was arrested on the night of 15 May, a week after he had read a statement on behalf of the exiled leader of the MB at the Jamal al-Atassi Forum political discussion group. The statement reiterated the MB's opposition to violence, rejected the accusation that it calls for a theocratic state in Syria, and called for political reforms in the country to allow respect for the rights of individuals.

Two senior members of the Jamal al-Atassi Forum were reportedly summoned by telephone to Political Security on 28 June. Apparently, during the phone call they were told that the Forum must close. Dr Suhayr Jamal al-Atassi and Jihad Massouti were among the eight board members released on 24 May, who had been arrested apparently in connection with the reading of the MB statement. They apparently did not attend the offices of Political Security and intend to go ahead with their next meeting, scheduled for 2 July, since they have not received official written instructions to close.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past few weeks the authorities have suddenly increased their harassment of people they view as critics, including a number of human rights defenders. Several have been detained, some incommunicado, and some have been charged by the SSSC, whose standards fall far short of international standards for fair trial (see public statement *Syria: End crackdown on human rights defenders*, MDE 24/034/2005, 25 May 2005 and UA 140/05, MDE 24/033/2005, 25 May 2005 and follow-ups).

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 'Ali al-'Abdullah immediately, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for his peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
- expressing concerns that 'Ali al-'Abdullah is facing trial before the SSSC, whose procedures fall far short of international standards for fair trial;
- seeking assurances that 'Ali al-'Abdullah will not be tortured or ill-treated;
- reminding them that 'Ali al-'Abdullah should be given regular access to his family, a lawyer of his choice and any medical care he may require;
- urging the authorities to release 'Ali al-'Abdullah from solitary confinement and allow him to mix with other detainees;
- reminding the authorities that Article 38 of the Syrian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression for its citizens, and that in detaining 'Ali al-'Abdullah, the authorities are breaching their obligations under the

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 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
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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
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Fax + 963 11 222 3428
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admin@civilaffair-moi.gov.sy
Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
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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 12 August 2005.