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## **Syria: Campaign to silence protesters overseas revealed**

Syrian protesters in Europe and the Americas have been systematically monitored and harassed by embassy officials and others believed to be acting on behalf of the Syrian regime, Amnesty International said today in a new briefing paper.

[\*The Long Reach of the Mukhabaraat\*](#) includes cases of more than 30 activists in eight countries - Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the USA – who say that they have faced intimidation from embassy officials and others and that their relatives in Syria have as a result, in some cases, apparently been exposed to harassment, detention and even torture.

“Expatriate Syrians have been trying, through peaceful protest, to highlight abuses that we consider amount to crimes against humanity - and that presents a threat to the Syrian regime,” said Neil Sammonds, Amnesty International's Syria researcher. “In response the regime appears to have waged a systematic - sometimes violent - campaign to intimidate Syrians overseas into silence.”

“This is yet more evidence that the Syrian government will not tolerate legitimate dissent and is prepared to go to great lengths to muzzle those who challenge it publicly.”

In many cases, the organization found that protesters outside Syrian embassies were initially filmed or photographed by officials then subjected to harassment of various kinds, including phone calls, emails and Facebook messages warning them to stop.

Some activists say they were directly threatened by embassy officials. Naima Darwish, who set up a Facebook page to call for protests outside the Syrian embassy in Santiago, Chile, was contacted directly by a senior official who asked to meet her in person.

“He told me that I should not to do such things,” she told Amnesty International. “He said I would lose the right to return to Syria if I continued.”

A number of Syrians found that their families back home were targeted by security forces, apparently to deter them from their activities overseas, with potentially devastating consequences.

Imad Mouhalhel's brother Aladdin was detained in Syria for four days in July. After apparently being tortured, he was shown photos and videos of protests outside the Syrian embassy in Spain and told to identify Imad among the participants.

On 29 August, Aladdin was re-arrested and apparently forced to phone Imad to ask him to stop going to the protests. Imad and his family have not heard from Aladdin since then and have grave fears for his safety in detention.

After Malek Jandali, a 38-year-old pianist and composer, performed at a pro-reform demonstration in front of the White House in July, his mother and father, aged 66 and 73 respectively, were attacked at

their home in Homs.

Malek told Amnesty International his parents were beaten and locked in a bathroom while their flat was looted. The agents told his parents: “This is what happens when your son mocks the government.” They have since fled the country.

Some families in Syria appear to have been forced to publicly disown their relatives overseas. Sondos Sulaiman recorded a video in June from Germany calling on her fellow Alawites – the minority group to which the ruling al-Assad family belongs - to stand up to the regime. She told Amnesty International:

“My brother appeared on Syrian state TV denouncing this video and saying bad things about me to ruin my credibility. I’m sure he would not have done this out of his own free will.”

Sondos has been unable to contact any of her family to confirm what is happening to them, in particular her brother.

Amnesty International said there was a need for host countries to take stronger action against Syrian embassies accused of orchestrating this kind of harassment and intimidation, and called on the countries concerned to protect the right to freedom of association and expression.

The organization understands that the US and UK Governments have raised the issue with the Syrian ambassadors to Washington and London respectively. Protesters in Spain told Amnesty International they were lodging a formal complaint through the local legal system.

"We look to host governments to act on credible allegations of abuses without waiting for formal complaints," said Neil Sammonds. "Many of the people we have spoken to are too scared of what could happen to them to make formal complaints with the police.

"We would expect that any official found responsible for such acts should be prosecuted, or – if diplomatic immunity prevents that – asked to leave the country."

#### **Notes for editors:**

- Amnesty International spokespeople are available for interview on this briefing paper. For more information, please contact the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 (0) 20 7413 5566 or email [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org)
- Please [click here to access B-roll footage](#)
- Syrians in the UK will stage a demonstration against the harassment detailed in Amnesty International’s briefing paper outside the Syrian Embassy in London – 8 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PH - on Tuesday 4 October from 1000-1100hrs BST. A group of Syrian nationals presently living in the UK will face the Syrian embassy holding aloft placards reading “I am not afraid”. The placards will bear their own names and home towns to signify that they will not be intimidated into silence or anonymity. There will be opportunities for filming and interviews. For more information, please contact the Amnesty International Press Office on +44 (0) 20 7413 5566 or email [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org)
- Visit our Eyes on Syria map which tracks cases of gross human rights violations documented by Amnesty International as well as campaigning actions taken by our members and supporters.