

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/007/2008

5 February 2008

Further Information on UA 333/07 (MDE 24/045/2007, 17 December 2007) and follow-ups (MDE 24/046/2007, 18 December 2007; MDE 24/002/2008, 7 January 2008; MDE 24/003/2008, 10 January 2008; MDE 24/006/2008, 30 January 2008) - Incommunicado detention/torture and ill-treatment/prisoners of conscience

SYRIA

- Dr Feda'a al-Horani (f), aged 51, physician
- Akram al-Bunni (m), aged 51, former prisoner of conscience, writer and political analyst
- Ahmad To'meh (m), aged 51, dentist
- Jabr al-Shoufi (m), aged 60, Arabic literature teacher
- 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged 57, former prisoner of conscience, journalist
- Dr Walid al-Bunni (m), aged 43, former prisoner of conscience, physician (no relation of Akram and Anwar al-Bunni)
- Dr Yasser al-'Eiti (m), aged 39, physician, poet
- Fayez Sarah (m), aged 58, writer, journalist
- Muhammed Haji Darwish (m), aged 48
- Marwan al-'Ush (m), aged 52, geological engineer
- Riad Seif (m), aged 61, former prisoner of conscience, former independent member of parliament

New name: Talal Abu Dan (m), aged 55, former prisoner of conscience, artist

Former prisoner of conscience Talal Abu Dan was arrested on 30 January by State Security officials in Aleppo city. He had attended the 1 December 2007 meeting of the pro-democracy umbrella group Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change (DDDNC), and this appears to be why he was arrested. Like the 11 others named above, who also attended the meeting, he is detained incommunicado and is at grave risk of torture.

Talal Abu Dan's studio was ransacked on 21 January, and most of his paintings and statues were destroyed.

He had spent 10 years as a prisoner of conscience, between 1981 and 1990.

The other 11 detainees had been brought before an investigating judge on 28 January, who charged them with "weakening national sentiments," under Article 285 of the Syrian Penal Code, "broadcasting false or exaggerated news which would affect the morale of the country" (Article 286), joining an "organization formed with the purpose of changing the financial or social status of the state" (Article 306), "inciting sectarian strife" (Article 307) and "joining a secret association" (Article 327). At least one of the men was prevented from speaking to his lawyers during the four hours of questioning before the meeting with the judge, but their lawyers were present during the session itself, but the judge refused to give them copies of the file.

Except for Feda'a al-Horani, who is being held at the women's prison in Douma, and Talal Abu Dan, these prisoners are being held at 'Adra prison in Damascus, where conditions are harsh and where they are reported to have been forced to sleep in a corridor for nine days without adequate covering with no bedding when the temperature fell below freezing at night. One, Riad Seif, is reported to have had his head forcibly shaved while 'Ali al-'Abdullah is reported to have been severely beaten while detained at the State Security branch in Damascus, sustaining an injury to his oesophagus.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The DDDNC is an unauthorised umbrella group of opposition and pro-democracy groups. The government began to crack down on the grouping on 9 December 2007: 46 DDDNC members have been arrested so far, of whom 34 were released within a few days. None of the 34 is known to have been charged.

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

- expressing concern that Talal Abu Dan was arrested on 30 January;
- calling on the Syrian authorities to release him and the other detainees (naming them) immediately, and drop all charges against them, which appear to be based solely on their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, as set out in the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Syria is a state party;
- calling on the authorities to order an independent investigation into reports that the detainees have been beaten and otherwise ill-treated, and to bring those responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that the detainees will suffer no further torture or ill-treatment.

APPEALS TO:

President

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

Minister of Defence

His Excellency General Hassan Ali Turkmani
Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 223 7842
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari
Ministry of Justice
Al-Nasr Street, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 666 2460
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Walid Mu'allim
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: + 963 11 3327620
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 18 March 2008.