

# URGENT ACTION

## FEARS FOR SYRIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER

**Human rights lawyer Abdullah al-Khalil is being held in incommunicado detention at an unknown location where he is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. He has not been seen since he was arrested on a street in al-Raqqa, eastern Syria, on 3 February.**

**Abdullah al-Khalil**, who is 50 years old, is a well-known lawyer who represents political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. He is a member of the Detainees' Defence Team in al-Raqqa, where he lives, and has reported on human rights violations taking place before and during the past year of protest and unrest. According to Syrian human rights activists, he was arrested on 3 February 2012 with several other lawyers, who have since been released, while on a street in al-Raqqa. Unconfirmed reports suggest he was tortured or otherwise ill-treated while detained at a branch of Military Intelligence in al-Raqqa, and then may have been transferred to another branch of Military Intelligence in Damascus, the capital. He is not known to have been charged with any offence. He had been detained on three other occasions in the past year and he and his family had been subjected to other forms of harassment from the Syrian authorities.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested in the past 12 months and many, if not most, are believed to have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has the names of more than 280 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment of former detainees. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see *"I wanted to die": Syria's torture survivors speak out*, March 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>.

### Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Syrian authorities to reveal Abdullah al-Khalil's whereabouts and legal status and ensure that he is provided with all necessary medical care, and is given immediate access to his family and lawyer;
- Expressing concern at reports that Abdullah al-Khalil may have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment while being held without charge at an unknown location, and urging that these reports be investigated promptly and impartially, with anyone found responsible for abuses brought to justice;
- Expressing concern that Abdullah al-Khalil is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression and his legitimate human rights work, and as such he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 3 MAY 2012 TO:

#### President

Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Fax: +963 11 332 3410 (keep trying)

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Minister of Defence

Dawood Rajiha  
Ministry of Defence  
Omayyad Square  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Fax: + 963 11 666 2460

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Minister of Foreign Affairs and

Expatriates  
Walid al-Mu'allim  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and  
Expatriates  
Al-Rashid Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
Fax: +963 11 214 625 12 / 13  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abdullah al-Khalil appears to have been subjected to a campaign of harassment by the Syrian authorities for his peaceful human rights activities, including carrying out his duties as a lawyer, Abdullah al-Khalil had been arrested three times already since May 2011 and was due to appear at court on 6 February 2012 on charges that appear to be politically motivated, namely “illegal building” on what the authorities alleged to be state land. On 1 May 2011 he was detained for one month and questioned about his alleged participation in unauthorised demonstrations and incitement of sectarian strife, charges commonly brought against perceived opponents of the government. Several days after his release he was included in a presidential amnesty. On 22 August 2011 he was arrested with 21 other lawyers and held for one week for participating in a peaceful sit-in at the Palace of Justice at al-Raqqa. On 15 December 2011 he was arrested in front of his home, along with his son who was released the next day, and held for some 11 days during which he was questioned about information he had posted on Facebook regarding the alleged torture in detention of several of his clients. He was charged with “spreading false news” and with both inciting and taking part in protests. On 18 December 2011 the family’s farmhouse was demolished on the orders of the Governor of al-Hasaka, apparently as a punishment for the human rights work of Abdullah al-Khalil. During the demolition, several of his family members were attacked by individuals working on behalf of the authorities and his nephew required medical treatment in hospital. As early as April 2011 Abdullah al-Khalil said that he had received death threats and that although he reported the threats to the authorities, they do not appear to have been investigated.

Pro-reform demonstrations began in Syria in February 2011 and evolved into mass protests in mid-March. The Syrian authorities have responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic and widespread human rights violations which amount to crimes against humanity, and has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as for imposition of a comprehensive arms embargo and an assets freeze on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and those close to him.

Amnesty International has received the names of more than 7200 people reported to have died or been killed during, or in connection with, the protests and unrest. Many are believed to have been shot by security forces using live ammunition while participating in peaceful protests or attending funerals of people killed in earlier protests. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting members of the army and others who have taken up arms against the government as well as by members of the security forces themselves for refusing to obey orders to shoot at protestors. Thousands of people have been arrested, with many held incommunicado at unknown locations at which torture and other ill-treatment are reported to be rife. Human rights defenders and other individuals who document or otherwise record or publicise information concerning human rights violations are at risk of arrest and being subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Many also receive threats to themselves and their families. As a consequence, several human rights defenders have going into hiding or left the country.

The Syrian state has multiple security and intelligence agencies in addition to even more opaque groups, often armed but not necessarily uniformed, who also carry out abductions, killings and other abuses in apparent coordination with, or at least approval of, state officials. Amnesty International has also received reports of armed individuals threatening, abusing and, in some cases, killing people perceived to be linked to or supportive of the authorities.

Name: Abdullah al-Khalil  
Gender m/f: Male

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