

URGENT ACTION

SYRIAN ACTIVIST AND 18-YEAR-OLD SON AT RISK

Prominent Syrian activist Walid al-Bunni and his 18-year-old son, Mu'ayad al-Bunni, have been held in incommunicado detention since 6 August. They were arrested while they were in hiding in Damascus, Syria. They are at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Walid al-Bunni and his two sons, **Mu'ayad al-Bunni** and **Iyad al-Bunni**, aged 18 and 19 respectively, were arrested on 6 August by armed men believed to be part of the Syrian Political Security forces. While Iyad al-Bunni was later released, no information on the whereabouts of his father and brother has been made public. A contact of Amnesty International believes that they may be held at a Political Security branch in Damascus. The family's lawyer told Amnesty International that he fears Mu'ayad al-Bunni may be subjected to torture or other ill-treatment to put pressure on his father. There are fears too that Walid al-Bunni is at serious risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Amnesty International was informed that Walid al-Bunni went into hiding with his two sons on 5 May after security forces broke into their flat and attacked his wife's pharmacy. Walid al-Bunni was previously detained on at least two occasions by the Syrian authorities, in 2001 and 2007, because of his activism in support of political reform. The family lawyer believes that Mu'ayad al-Bunni did not take part in any of the recent public protests demanding reform and that President Bashar al-Assad should relinquish power.

The Syrian authorities have not said why Walid al-Bunni and Mu'ayad al-Bunni were arrested and have not disclosed any information about them. Amnesty International considers it likely that Walid al-Bunni has been detained solely because of his legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and his involvement in peaceful pro-reform protests. It is also likely that Mu'ayad al-Bunni has been detained solely to put pressure on his father. If this is the case, they are both prisoners of conscience and Amnesty International calls for their immediate and unconditional release.

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

- Express concern that Walid and Mu'ayad al-Bunni have been held incommunicado since 6 August, putting them at grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment, and ask for their whereabouts and legal status to be revealed immediately;
- Express concern that Walid al-Bunni may be held solely for his peaceful pro-reform activities and that Mu'ayad al-Bunni may be held purely on account of his family relationship to his father, in which case they are prisoners of conscience and they should be released immediately and unconditionally;
- Urge the authorities to ensure that Walid and Mu'ayad al-Bunni are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with their family and a lawyer of their choice, and provided with any medical attention they require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 5 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

President

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

Salutation: Your Excellency

Ministry of Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
 Ibrahim al-Shaar
 Minister of Interior
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 113110554

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 214 6251/2/3

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

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

**AMNESTY
 INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Syrian security forces have been carrying out widespread arrests in response to mass protests calling for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to step down, which began in mid-March 2011. The arrests have targeted people perceived to have organized or openly supported those protests, whether orally in public gatherings, in the media, on the internet or elsewhere. They include journalists, political and human rights activists, and mosque imams. The wave of arrests has forced a number of activists and journalists into hiding.

Amnesty International has gathered sufficient information to indicate that interrogators in detention facilities question detainees under torture on whether or not they have given information about events in Syria to regional and international media outlets.

Walid al-Bunni was imprisoned for lengthy periods of time on two previous occasions. He was first imprisoned for five years from 2001 to 2006 after an unfair trial before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) for his activities during the "Damascus Spring", a period following Bashar al-Assad's accession to the presidency in July 2000 during which the authorities tolerated previously prohibited discussion forums on political and cultural issues. In August and September of 2001 a wave of arrests brought the "Damascus Spring" to an end.

His second imprisonment was for two and a half years from 17 December 2007 to 16 June 2010 for his involvement in the Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change, an unauthorized coalition of political parties, human rights organizations and pro-democracy activists, which calls for peaceful, democratic reform and respect for human rights.

Amnesty International spoke with Walid al-Bunni while he was in hiding on 21 June 2011. He mentioned then that he was focusing on "supporting the injured, organizing the protests and encouraging the protestors." Although he was in hiding he delivered a speech to around 30,000 people in the town of Harasta, near Damascus, to encourage them to peacefully protest and demand an end to the current regime of President Bashar al-Assad. His tone was positive as he said that they were living in "a new Syria where everyone calls for the same values."

Syrian activists have also told Amnesty International that although he did not attend it Walid al-Bunni had an instrumental role in organizing the National Salvation Conference, a conference of Syrian opposition activists to discuss Syria's future which was held in Turkey in July 2011.

For further information on Walid al-Bunni, please see: Amnesty International News: *Syrian authorities target prominent dissident and teenage son*, 19 August 2011 (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/syrian-authorities-target-prominent-dissident-and-teenage-son-2011-08-19>)

Name: Walid al-Bunni and Mu'ayad al-Bunni

Gender m/f: Both m

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