

URGENT ACTION

FIVE RIGHTS DEFENDERS REMAIN INCOMMUNICADO

Five staff of an NGO, the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression, including its director, Mazen Darwish, are still detained in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance, despite orders for Mazen Darwish to be brought before a military court.

Mazen Darwish was arrested along with a group of 13 staff members of the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression as well as two visitors who were in the office on 16 February when it was raided by uniformed men believed to be members of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence. Eleven members of the group have since been released, eight of them on bail to await trial before a military court.

Mazen Darwish, **Hussein Gharir**, **Hani al-Zitani**, **Mansour al-Omari** and **Abd al-Rahman Hamada** are detained incommunicado at an unknown location. The authorities have ignored their families and lawyers' repeated requests for information about them. Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience, held solely on account of their peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression and association in the CMFE.

According to recently released detainees, Mazen Darwish and Hussein Gharir are being held at an Air Force Intelligence branch in Damascus, while Hani al-Zitani, Mansour al-Omari and Abd al-Rahman Hamada are believed to be held in the town of al-Mo'damiyah, just outside Damascus. Three men who were detained at the same base from 19 March until 22 April have said that they and the three SCM staff members were tortured and beaten there.

The eight awaiting trial before a military court in Damascus have been charged with "having an illegal recording device with a view to distributing banned publications". According to their lawyers, the judge overseeing the proceedings made two requests to the Air Force Intelligence to present Mazen Darwish as a witness during hearings on 29 May and 25 June but the security forces failed to comply. The lawyers asked the judge to file another request for the next hearing, scheduled for 6 August.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language

- Calling on the Syrian authorities to release Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir and Mansour al-Omari immediately and unconditionally;
- Urging them to ensure that Mazen Darwish, Hani al-Zitani, Abd al-Rahman Hamada, Hussein Gharir, and Mansour al-Omari are protected from torture and other ill-treatment, allowed immediate contact with their families and lawyers of their choice, and provided with any medical attention they may require;
- Calling on them to drop all charges against the other eight related solely to their peaceful activities for, or links with, the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 AUGUST 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 Interior

His Excellency Major General Mohamad
 Ibrahim al-Shaar, Ministry of Interior,
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 211 9578 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Walid al-Mu'allim
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs
 al-Rashid Street
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
 Fax: +963 11 214 6253 (keep trying)
Salutation: Your Excellence

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of the Russian Federation accredited to your country, as below:

Name Address 1 Fax Fax number Email Email address

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 67/12 Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/047/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The eight others on trial are **Sanaa Mohsen, Mayada Khalil, Razan Ghazzawi, Yara Badr, Bassam Al-Ahmad, Joan Fersso, Ayham Ghazoul** and visitor **Hanadi Zahlout**. If convicted and imprisoned, Amnesty International would consider them prisoners of conscience. The other staff members, **Rita Dayoub** and **Maha Assabalani**, along with visitor **Shadi Yazbek**, were released and are not known to be facing prosecution.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested since protests broke out and many, if not most, are believed to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated. Amnesty International has the names of more than 430 people reported to have died in custody in this period and has documented many cases of torture or other ill-treatment. For further information about torture and other ill-treatment of detainees in Syria, see "*I wanted to die*": *Syria's torture survivors speak out* <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>.

Amnesty International has also received many reports of people apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide their families with any information on the fate of these people, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by the security forces. 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. The human rights situation in Syria has continued to deteriorate despite the Syrian government's acceptance on 27 March 2012 of the six-point plan drawn up by the Joint Special Envoy for the United Nations and the Arab League on Syria, Kofi Annan, and the ceasefire agreement of 12 April which has not been respected, leading to the suspension of the UNSMIS observer mission on 16 June 2012,. Since 27 March, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance and has documented crimes against humanity and war crimes in northern Syria (see *Deadly Reprisals: Deliberate killings and other abuses by Syria's armed forces*, Index MDE 24/041/2012, June 2012, (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/041/2012/en>).

Although the vast majority of the human rights abuses documented by Amnesty International were committed by the state's security and armed forces, including *shabiha* militias, abuses have also been committed by armed opposition groups, including the torture and killing of captured soldiers and *shabiha* as well as the kidnapping and killing of people known or suspected to support or work with the government and its forces and militias. Amnesty International condemns without reservation such abuses and calls on the leadership of all armed opposition groups in Syria to publicly state that such acts are prohibited and to do all within their power to ensure that opposition forces put an immediate end to such abuses.

Since April 2011, Amnesty International has documented systematic, as well as widespread, human rights abuses, crimes against humanity and possible war crimes. The organization has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as well as an international arms embargo aimed at halting the flow of weapons to the Syrian government, and an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates. The organization is also calling on states considering supplying weapons to the armed opposition to have in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure the material supplied is not used to commit human rights abuses and/or war crimes.

Go to the interactive Eyes on Syria map (www.eyesonsyria.org) to see where human rights violations are being committed in Syria, and Amnesty International's global activism to seek justice.

Names: Mazen Darwish, Hussein Gharir, Hani al-Zitani, Mansour al-Omari, Abd al-Rahman Hamada

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 67/12 Index: MDE 24/065/2012 Issue Date: 13 July 2012