URGENT ACTION

KURDISH POLITICAL ACTIVISTS DETAINED IN SYRIA

Four Kurdish political activists were detained on 26 December in Syria, and have been held incommunicado since then. They are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Hassan Saleh, **Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa** and **Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed** - all senior members of the unauthorized Syrian Kurdish Yeketi Party in Syria - and **Anwer Naso**, also a member of the Yeketi Party, were arrested on 26 December by members of Political Security, one of Syria's security agencies. Political Security regularly detains individuals perceived as opposing or being critical of the Syrian regime. Their detention came around three weeks after the men attended a Yeketi Party conference that called for autonomy in the Kurdish areas in Syria.

The four activists were arrested when they presented themselves to the Political Security branch in Qamishli, a predominantly Kurdish city in north-eastern Syria, in response to an order to see the head of office there. The head of office has reportedly indicated that the men were taken into custody and then transferred to a detention centre elsewhere in Syria. Since their arrest, they are believed to have had no contact with the outside world.

Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa takes regular medication for an overactive thyroid and Hassan Saleh needs medication for health problems including an underactive thyroid and high cholesterol. He has constant pain from a slipped disc in his back for which he takes painkillers and is under instructions not to carry more than two kilograms in weight following a hernia operation he underwent in 2006. Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed also suffers from a slipped disc in his back. The men may not have access to their medication in detention.

Amnesty International believes that the four activists are likely to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for peacefully expressing their political opinions regarding issues relating to Kurds in Syria.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to reveal the fate and whereabouts of the four men without further delay and to allow them immediate access to their families and lawyers;
- Expressing concern that the four activists may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression in relation to Kurdish issues in Syria, and urging the authorities that if this is the case, they should release them immediately and unconditionally;
- Asking the authorities to ensure that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment and are given access to any medication and medical treatment they require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 9 MARCH 2010 TO:

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

Minister of Interior
Major Sa'id Mohamed Samour
Ministry of Interior
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 222 3428
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Walid al-Mu'allim
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
al-Rashid Street
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 7620
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Hassan Saleh was born in 1947 and is married with seven children; Muhammad Ahmed Mustafa was born in 1962 and is married with one child; Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed was born in 1954 and is married with four children; and Anwer Naso was born in 1962 and is married with three children.

The Kurds comprise up to 10 per cent of the population of Syria and reside mostly around the city of Aleppo in the north of the country and the al-Jazeera region in the north-east. These predominantly Kurdish areas lag behind the rest of the country in terms of social and economic indicators. Kurds are subjected to identity-based discrimination, including restrictions on the use of their language in schools and the use of culture, such as bans on producing and circulating Kurdish music.

Like other Kurdish political organizations, the Yeketi Party is unauthorized in Syria. Indeed, those who raise concerns about the treatment of Kurds in the country can face prolonged arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment. For example, Hassan Saleh, one of the four detained last month, was arrested along with hundreds of others in November 2008 for taking part in a demonstration against a presidential decree which increased restrictions on housing and property rights in border areas mainly inhabited by Kurds.

At the time of his arrest on 26 December 2009, Hassan Saleh had an appeal pending against a 13-month sentence from a military court for membership of an unauthorized political organization and inciting "sectarian strife". These charges arose from allegations that he organized and participated in a demonstration in November 2007 protesting against Turkish attacks on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq. He denies attending this demonstration, which was organized by another Kurdish party.

Hassan Saleh was subjected to beatings by members of the Political Security when he was arrested in 2002 after he participated in a peaceful demonstration celebrating the universally recognized Human Rights Day on 10 December. He had called on the government to remove the barriers imposed on the Kurdish language and culture, and release all political prisoners (see Amnesty International's Urgent Action of 18 December 2002, MDE 24/053/2002 and updates).

Ma'rouf Mulla Ahmed was arrested in August 2007 by State Security, another of Syria's security agencies, in August 2007 while travelling by bus to Lebanon to visit friends. He was held for over six months without access to legal representation (see Amnesty International's Urgent Action of 20 August 2007, MDE 24/041/2007 and updates). Muhammad Ahmad Mustafa was reportedly arrested in 2003 for organizing a march for children who carried placards calling for nationality rights for all Kurds born in Syria.

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