

BROTHERS HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR MONTHS**SYRIA****Ghassan Mustafa Ma'lul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'lul (both m)**

Syrian brothers Ghassan Mustafa Ma'lul and Ahmad Mustafa Ma'lul were arrested at a checkpoint at al-Rabikh, near Saraqeb, Idlib province, in northern Syria on 20 November 2011 and have been held in incommunicado detention since. On 13 April 2012, they were shown on Syrian TV "confessing" to murder. Amnesty International believes they are at serious risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Brothers Ghassan Mostafa Ma'alul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'alul were working on a well-digging project near their hometown of Saraqeb when they were arrested by members of the security forces manning a checkpoint. According to a source in Syria, after their arrest they were taken to the Political Security branch in Idlib. When the family attempted to bring them clothes, a member of the security forces confirmed that both men were being held there but were not allowed visits and the family was not allowed to leave anything for them. The same source told Amnesty International that the men were not allowed to see a lawyer.

According to released detainees, both men were moved to a Political Security branch in the capital, Damascus, in early April 2012 and returned to the same branch in Idlib on 18 April. One person detained with the brothers in Idlib claimed that both were tortured repeatedly prior to being moved to Damascus. The authorities have not advised the family of the reason for their arrest, but on 13 April, both men appeared on a government-run Syrian TV station "confessing" to being part of a group that killed two men in exchange for money on 2 October 2011. They also "confessed" to other criminal activities including arson. The family does not believe the brothers were involved in these crimes. In an earlier public "confession" on the same TV station, in December 2011, another detainee stated that he had heard a different person claiming to have killed, with the help of a relative, the same two men.

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

- * Expressing concern that Ghassan Mustafa Ma'lul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'lul have been detained incommunicado since 20 November 2011 and urging the authorities to ensure that they are provided with all necessary medical care, protected from torture and other ill-treatment and given immediate access to their families and lawyer of their choice;
- * Asking for clarification of Ghassan Mustafa Ma'lul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'lul's legal status;
- * Calling on the authorities to set up a prompt, independent and impartial investigation into the reports of torture or other ill-treatment of both men and to bring anyone responsible for abuses to justice.
- * Ensure that no statements obtained as a result of torture or other ill-treatment are used as evidence in trial proceedings, except as evidence against a person accused of torture or other ill-treatment;

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 15 JUNE 2012 TO: (Time difference = GMT + 2 hrs / BST + 1 hrs)

President
Bashar al-Assad
Presidential Palace, al-Rashid Street

Damascus,
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: 00963 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: 00963 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: 00963 11 214 6253 (keep
trying)
Salutation: Your Excellency

PLEASE SEND COPIES OF YOUR APPEAL TO

His Excellency Dr Sami M Khiyami, Embassy of the Syrian Arab Republic, 8 Belgrave Square, London, SW1X 8PH

Fax: 020 7235 4621 Website: <http://syremb.com>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to Syria's news agency SANA, Saria Hassoun, a son of Syria's Grand Mufti, was shot and killed on 2 October 2011 along with a history professor from Aleppo University. In their video confession, the brothers claimed they were paid 50,000 Syrian Pounds (approximately £530) each for intercepting and shooting Saria Hassoun's car, along with at least eight other men. Prior to this, on 16 December 2011, SANA reported that a man named as Mohammad Deib Jamal Shaaban claimed to have been told by a Mohammad Mouaiad al-Tahan that he had killed Saria Hassoun and that his cousin had then killed the professor. Mohammad Mouaiad al-Tahan is not among the names given by Ghassan Mostafa Ma'alul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'alul as members of the group responsible for the killing. It is unclear whether an investigation was opened into the accusations against Mohammad Mouajad al-Tahan in December. The video of their "confession" can be found here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5js83o_4IE. The earlier "confession" by Mohammad Deib Jamal Shaaban can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYbyTyR2VBI>. Ghassan Mostafa Ma'alul and Ahmad Mostafa Ma'alul have never previously been arrested and were not involved in the ongoing unrest as far as Amnesty International's sources are aware.

Largely peaceful pro-reform demonstrations in Syria began sporadically in February 2011 but became larger and more frequent after the first killings of demonstrators the following month. The protests were largely peaceful, yet the Syrian authorities have responded in the most brutal manner in their efforts to suppress them. In the year since then, although peaceful demonstrations have continued, the unrest has turned increasingly violent, with armed opposition groups, many loosely under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) carrying out attacks mainly against Syrian security forces. Amnesty International has obtained the names of more than 8,800 people reported to have died or been killed during or in connection with the protests and related unrest since mid-March 2011. Members of the security forces have also been killed, some by defecting soldiers who have taken up arms against the government.

Thousands of suspected opponents of the Syrian government have been arrested in the past 14 months and many are believed to have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International has the names of more than 350 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 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE24/016/2012/en>. Amnesty International has also received many reports of individuals apparently subjected to enforced disappearance, where state officials have failed to provide families with any information concerning the fate of individuals, most of whom are believed to have been arrested by security forces.

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, Amnesty International has continued to receive reports of arrests and continuing detention of people in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance.

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 an international arms embargo on Syria, and for an assets freeze on President Bashar al-Assad and his close associates.

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.

PLEASE CHECK WITH THE INDIVIDUALS AT RISK PROGRAMME AT AIUK BEFORE SENDING APPEALS AFTER 15 JUNE 2012

Individuals at Risk Programme, Amnesty International UK, 17-25 New Inn Yard, London EC2A 3EA, 0207 033 1572, iar@amnesty.org.uk.