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Syria: Release Kamal al-Labwani

On the eve of his final trial session before the Damascus Criminal Court, Amnesty International today repeats its call upon the Syrian authorities to release immediately and unconditionally peaceful advocate of reform Kamal al-Labwani.

Kamal al-Labwani could face up to life imprisonment for "scheming with a foreign country, or communicating with one with the aim of causing it to attack Syria", under Article 264 of the Syrian Penal Code. He has been detained since his arrest upon his return to Syria on 8 November 2005, following a trip to Europe and the USA where he met human rights organisations and government officials and peacefully called for democratic reform in Syria. The charge relates to Kamal al-Labwani's calls for peaceful reform and for respect for human rights in Syria.

Medical doctor Kamal al-Labwani is a previous prisoner of conscience, having been sentenced to three years' imprisonment after an unfair trial for his involvement in the peaceful pro-reform movement known as the "Damascus Spring". He was released on 9 September 2004.

There are increased concerns for the fate of Kamal al-Labwani following the sentencing of leading human rights lawyer Anwar Al-Bunni, who received a five-year sentence on 24 April 2007 following an unfair trial which appeared politically motivated, on account of his work defending human rights. The verdict in the trial of Michel Kilo and Mahmoud 'Issa, two other prominent peaceful advocates of reform who have been detained since May 2006, is expected on 13 May. Amnesty International calls for all four men to be released immediately and unconditionally.