

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

News Flash

AI Index: MDE 24/048/2002 (Public)
News Service No: 209
18 November 2002

Syria: Leading opposition activist released

Amnesty International today welcomed the release of Riad al-Turk, 72, prisoner of conscience and leading opposition activist, from 'Adra Prison following a personal Presidential amnesty on 16 November.

"This is a very positive step, but the Syrian authorities should not stop here. All other prisoners of conscience detained in August and September 2001, including 'Aref Dalilah, Hasan Sa'dun and Habib Saleh who are reportedly suffering from ill-health, should be released immediately."

Riad al-Turk is a leading member of the National Democratic Alliance, a coalition of various Syrian opposition groups and the First Secretary of the unauthorized Syrian Communist Party - Political Bureau. He had been detained as a prisoner of conscience without charge or trial and mostly incommunicado from 1980 to 1998. Riad al-Turk was re-arrested by the security forces on 1 September 2001 during a wider crackdown on government critics. He was sentenced to two and a half years in prison by the Supreme State Security Court on charges including "attempting to change the constitution by illegal means" on 26 June 2002. Riad al-Turk is known to be suffering from diabetes as well as a heart condition.

Amnesty International has regularly expressed its concerns in public statements about the politically motivated detention and unfair trial of a dozen prominent opposition figures and activists in civil society groups since September 2001.

Public Document

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