

PUBLIC

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UA 242/07 Incommunicado detention/ fear of torture or ill-treatment/ possible prisoner of conscience

SYRIA Kareem 'Arabji (m), aged 29,

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Kareem 'Arabji has been held incommunicado by Military Intelligence in the capital, Damascus, since his arrest on 7 June. Amnesty International believes that he is now being held at the Palestine Branch of Military Intelligence in Damascus, where he is at grave risk of torture and ill-treatment. He may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his political views.

According to information received by Amnesty International, Kareem 'Arabji, a business consultant, is being detained for his role in managing an online youth forum, [www.akhawia.net](http://www.akhawia.net). Prior to his arrest he was summoned several times to the al-Muntaqa ("Area") Military Intelligence branch in Damascus in relation to the online forum. Since his arrest he has not been charged or otherwise brought before a court and has not been granted access to a lawyer or to his family.

In June 2007, seven men were sentenced to prison terms of either five or seven years after an unfair trial, apparently for publishing pro-democracy material on the same website. They were convicted of "taking action or making a written statement or speech which could endanger the State or harm its relationship with a foreign country, or expose it to the risk of hostile action" under Article 278 of the Syrian Penal Code. The group all said that "confessions" had been extracted from them under torture while they were detained incommunicado (see UA 41/06, MDE 24/019/2006, 17 February 2006, and follow-ups).

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Torture is widespread in Syrian detention and investigation centres, particularly during periods of pre-trial incommunicado detention, and the Palestine Branch is renowned for being one of the worst centres for detainees. Over the years, Amnesty International has documented 38 types of torture and ill-treatment used against detainees in Syria. "Confessions" extracted under duress are systematically used as "evidence" in Syrian courts, and the defendants' claims of torture are almost never investigated. In 2007, according to reports received by Amnesty International, at least three individuals have died as a result of torture and ill-treatment in custody in Syria.

## RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that Kareem 'Arabji has been detained incommunicado since 7 June;
- expressing concern that he may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his political views.
- urging that he be humanely treated and not subjected to torture or ill-treatment in detention;
- calling on the authorities to allow him immediate and unrestricted access to his family, a lawyer, and any medical treatment he may require;
- calling for his immediate release, unless he is to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

## APPEALS TO:

President  
His Excellency Bashar al-Assad  
Presidential Palace  
al-Rashid Street

Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax:** + 963 11 332 3410  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Minister of Defence  
His Excellency General  
Hassan Ali Turkmani  
Ministry of Defence  
Omayyad Square  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax:** +963 11 223 7842  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Minister of Justice  
His Excellency Muhammad al-Ghafari  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax:** +963 11 666 2460  
**Salutation:** Your Excellency

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

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 23 October 2007.