

SYRIA HEALTH CRISIS

APPEAL FOR ACTION

This document advises on letter-writing action that can be taken by health professionals in connection with the Amnesty International report, *Health Crisis: Syrian government targets the wounded and health workers*, which will be launched on 25 October 2011.

More than 2600 people have been killed since the current unrest began in Syria in March 2011. Scores others have been injured. While serious injuries require prompt and adequate medical attention, it is precisely at such moments of greatest need that healthcare services in Syria have become another casualty of the internal disturbances: vulnerable to disruption, interference, and attack.

This report provides a compelling picture of how Syrian authorities have turned hospitals and medical staff into instruments of repression by blocking access to healthcare for people wounded during protests and other incidents related to the unrest; and preventing health professionals from treating such patients freely and without fear of reprisal.

It is based on research conducted in August and September 2011 in the form of interviews with individuals wounded during the ongoing disturbances; relatives of those wounded and subsequently detained; relatives of people with firearm and other injuries related to the unrest; and health workers, including surgeons, doctors, nurses and other hospital employees.

Amnesty International findings show that security personnel have subjected wounded people to torture and other ill treatment; acted with blatant disregard for hospital standards regarding the safety and welfare of patients; and interfered in the medical care of those wounded who are perceived as government opponents. Also, wounded patients in at least four state-run hospitals have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment at the hands of hospital staff, including some doctors and nurses; in some cases, patients have faced discrimination in access to and quality of healthcare.

Health workers have been among the thousands of people who have been arrested by the army and security forces and detained incommunicado where torture and other ill-treatment are reported to be rife either for treating people injured during the unrest without reporting them to the authorities or because they are suspected of peaceful activities, such as participating in peaceful demonstrations and providing information about human rights violations.

Such actions flagrantly violate Syria's obligations under international human rights law. Syrians have the right to life, security and liberty and an adequate standard of living, including medical care, regardless of their political views.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY TO:

Minister of Health

His Excellency
Dr Rida Said
Majlis ash-Sha'b
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 331 1114

Minister of Higher Education

His Excellency
Dr Abdul Razzaq al-Sheikh Issa-
Minister of Higher Education
Ministry of Higher Education
Ziad bin Abu Sufian Street
Damascus
Syrian Arab Republic
Fax: +963 11 332 7719

Minister of Defence

His Excellency
Lieutenant- General Ali
Ben-Mohammed Habib
Mahmoud
Ministry of Defence
Omayyad Square
Damascus
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The Minister of Health is responsible for national hospitals

The Minister of Higher Education is responsible for university hospitals.

The Minister of Defence is the deputy chief of the army and is responsible for the Military Intelligence.
The Ministry of Defence is in charge of the facilities that provide services to members of the armed forces such as military hospitals.

MODEL LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE:

Your Excellency,

As a health professional concerned about human rights, I am writing to express my concerns regarding reports of serious human rights violations against people wounded in the popular protests or other incidents related to the uprising, as well as health professionals perceived to be government opponents, and to urge you to take concrete steps to address these concerns.

*In its latest report **Health Crisis: Syrian government targets the wounded and health workers**, which was published on 25 October, Amnesty International has found that wounded Syrian protestors or others perceived as government opponents have been verbally abused and physically assaulted in state-run hospitals, including by medical staff, and in some cases denied medical care, in gross breach of medical ethics, and many of those taken to hospital have been detained.*

Amnesty International's research also found that some health professionals have been subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture or other ill-treatment for providing much-needed medical treatment to the wounded without reporting them to the authorities or for exercising other peaceful activities perceived as opposed to the government..

On the other hand, abuses committed by health professionals and hospital staffs against vulnerable individuals, including wounded patients, have gone largely unrecognized and unpunished by hospital managements, government ministries and official medical bodies.

In light of these very disturbing reports, I urge you to:

- give strict and clear instructions to all public and private hospitals to accept and treat all wounded patients without delay, and to prioritize the interests of the patients over any other priorities set by the security and other authorities;*
- hold to account any health professional or employee at hospitals and other health facilities who violates medical ethics by misusing their position to subject vulnerable individuals, including wounded patients, to verbal or physical abuse, torture or ill-treatment, or deny them necessary medical care.*
- ensure health professionals are allowed to perform their duty of attending to persons with medical needs or to exercise their right to freedom of expression or other peaceful activities without fear of arbitrary arrest and detention;*

Yours sincerely,

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 NOVEMBER 2011

If you receive no reply within six weeks of sending your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response. Please send copies of any letters you receive to the International Secretariat, attention of the Syria Team, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, or email the health and detention team at HEALTHDETENTION@AMNESTY.ORG

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL HEALTH NETWORK COORDINATORS: Please liaise with your section for further campaigning ideas and materials.

Thank you for all your support and any action you can take!