

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/007/2007

25 January 2007

Further Information on UA 41/06 (MDE 24/019/2006, 17 February 2006) and follow-up (MDE 24/020/2006, 21 February 2006; MDE 24/023/2006, 7 March 2006; MDE 24/029/2006, 31 March 2006; MDE 24/036/2006, 11 May 2006; MDE 24/059/2006, 3 October 2006) - Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/prisoners of conscience

SYRIA **Husam 'Ali Mulhim (m), aged 21, student**
 Tarek Ghorani (m), student
 Maher Ibrahim (m), aged around 25, shop owner
 Ayham Saqr (m), aged around 30, works in a beauty salon
 'Alam Fakhour (m) aged around 26
 'Omar 'Ali al-'Abdullah (m), aged around 21, student
 Diab Sirieyeh (m), aged around 26, part-time student

Released: **'Ali Nizar 'Ali (m), aged 21, student**

'Ali Nizar 'Ali was released under a presidential amnesty to mark the Muslim festival, Eid al Adha, which took place on 28 December. He had been charged under Article 287 of the Syrian Penal Code in relation to the "broadcasting of false news" deemed to be harmful to the state. 'Ali Nizar 'Ali is believed to be in good health.

The other seven men named above remain in Sednaya prison on the outskirts of Damascus. They are being tried by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on charges under Article 287. They are also charged with a more serious offence under Article 278: that of taking action or making a written statement or speech which could endanger the State, harm its relationship with a foreign country, or expose it to the risk of hostile action by that country. The seven appeared in court on 14 January 2007, but the case was adjourned until 15 April to allow the defence lawyers to prepare their case.

Reportedly, the men met with their lawyers at the court on 14 January in a room inside the court, in the presence of a guard. They were also allowed a short visit from their families, lasting about two minutes. They are reported to be in good health.

The men had been held incommunicado since their detention by the Air Force Intelligence Branch, between 26 January and 18 March 2006, and were reportedly subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience apparently held in connection with pro-democracy activities, including writing political articles for various websites.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Trials before the SSSC are known to fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants have no right of appeal; they are given only restricted access to their lawyers, and confessions allegedly extracted under torture are admissible as evidence. The practice of torture and other ill-treatment is systematic in Syria.

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

- welcoming the release of 'Ali Nizar 'Ali and at the same time calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the other seven men (naming them) as Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience held for peacefully expressing their beliefs;
- reminding the authorities that the proceedings against the seven men before the SSSC must comply with international standards for fair trial;

- calling for the allegations that the men made confessions under torture to be properly and independently investigated.

APPEALS TO:

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Salutation: Your Excellency

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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 8 March 2007.