

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 24/014/2009

12 May 2009

Further information on UA 90/09 (MDE 24/007/2009, 30 March 2009), and follow-ups (MDE 24/09/2009, 9 April 2009; MDE 24/012/2009, 6 May 2009) Fear of torture or other ill-treatment

**SYRIA**                    **Maryam Kallis (f), aged 36, UK national**  
**New name: Yasser Zahur Ahmed (m), aged 28, UK national**

---

Another UK national is now known to have been arrested shortly after Maryam Kallis. Like her, Yasser Zahur Ahmed is being held without access to a lawyer or to his family and without charge in a detention centre in the Kafr Sousa district of Damascus. Both are now known to be accused of involvement in terrorism.

On 10 May, UK Sunday newspaper *The Observer* quoted a member of the upper house of the British parliament as saying that he had been told by a "senior official at the Syrian Embassy in London that other British agencies – and not the Foreign Office – had been involved in the detention" of Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed. The Syrian embassy in London responded by announcing that Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed were being held on suspicion of connections with a "terrorist organisation" related to al-Qaeda. They claimed that "Ms Kallis is involved in receiving funds... and in conveying the funds to [al-Qaeda]."

This is the first time the Syrian authorities have made any public statement on their reasons for holding Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed, who have been allowed two supervised visits from officials from the British Consulate, but have been denied their right to access to legal counsel and their families for almost two months. They remain at risk of torture and other ill-treatment given their continued isolation from the outside world.

Yasser Ahmed was arrested on 17 March, two days after Maryam Kallis, at the Abi Noor Language Institute in the Rukna al-Din area of Damascus, where he was in his second year studying Arabic. He had travelled to Syria with his wife and daughter, who is now aged five, in October 2006. Before he travelled to Syria, he had been managing a drop-in centre in London for people with mental health problems.

Maryam Kallis arrived in Syria from the UK on 5 March and was staying with her sister before her arrest, 10 days later. She had returned to Syria to collect her three children, aged between five and eight, who were staying in Damascus with her sister. She intended to return with them to London at the end of March but was arrested by 10 men in plain clothes in Damascus while with her eight-year-old son.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Dozens of people are arrested every year in Syria, accused of being Islamists linked in some way with terrorism. They are generally held incommunicado for weeks or months, before being tried and convicted in proceedings which fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Many are convicted on little or no evidence. Some of them say in court that they were forced to "confess" under torture or other ill-treatment, but the courts do not investigate these allegations.

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

- calling on the authorities to release Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed immediately and unconditionally unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial;

- urging the authorities to ensure that Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed are not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- welcoming the fact that Maryam Kallis and Yasser Ahmed have been given access to British consular staff on two occasions, but urging the authorities to allow them regular visits from UK representatives in Damascus, and immediate access to their families and to lawyers of their choosing.

**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 Interior

His Excellency Sa'id Sammour  
Ministry of Interior  
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 2223428**  
**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 Ahmad Yunis  
Ministry of Justice  
Al-Nasr Street  
Damascus  
Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 666 2460**  
**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 June 2009.