

PUBLIC

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UA 104/06

Forcible return / Fear of torture and ill-treatment /
Incommunicado detention/ health concern

25 April 2006

UAE / SYRIA Riad 'Abdullah Laila (m) aged around 51 years

Riad 'Abdullah Laila is in danger of forcible return to Syria from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). If returned he would be at risk of serious human rights violations including torture. He is said to be in poor health, having undergone major heart surgery on four occasions. He has also had his spleen removed. His family have been unable to contact him or obtain any information about his whereabouts or well-being.

Riad 'Abdullah Laila has been a member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) since 1981. Torture and ill-treatment of MB affiliates, their family members, and people forcibly returned to Syria is widespread. Under Law 49, affiliates of the MB can be sentenced to death, although this is usually commuted to a 12-year prison sentence.

Riad 'Abdullah Laila was born to a Kurdish family in the Syrian capital Damascus. He has been living in Iraq since 1980, reportedly as a refugee. Whilst in Iraq, he got married and had a family but reportedly decided to leave for the UAE as a result of the continuing deterioration in the country following the 2003 US led invasion.

Riad 'Abdullah Laila left Iraq for UAE around the middle of April 2006, but reportedly heard on arrival in the UAE that the Syrian authorities had requested his arrest. He travelled to the Jordanian capital Amman, on 17 April where he was arrested at the airport. He was held at the airport until 19 April when the Jordanian authorities returned him to al-Sharika airport in the UAE. He was reportedly arrested by Dubai security officials after he landed and before he reached passport control. His family had hoped that he would be sent instead to Yemen, where they thought he would be safer as part of a sizable Syrian community.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Many Muslim Brotherhood supporters and sympathisers, real or suspected, and their families, fled Syria following armed clashes which began in the late 1970s, and the introduction of Law 49 in 1980. Many MB detainees were extrajudicially executed in custody. Scores of those who left, and their family members, have been arrested on their return to Syria, even after receiving consent from the Syrian authorities. Dozens of these detainees including children have reportedly been tortured, on account of their suspected links with the MB. Several have "disappeared", and at least one died in custody in March 2002, while held incommunicado. In addition they face grossly unfair trials. (See AI Public Statement, *Syria: Ongoing risks for Syrian returnees*, MDE 24/025/2005, 13 May 2005; and AI Appeal Case, *Deported to where?! Incommunicado detention and torture of forcibly returned Syrians*, MDE 24/085/2005, 19 September 2005 and updates.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, English,

To the UAE authorities

- calling on the authorities not to forcibly return Riad 'Abdullah Laila to Syria where he would be at risk of serious human rights abuses;
- stating that his return would be in contravention of the customary norm of *non-refoulement*, which places an obligation on all states not to deport anyone to a country where they would be at risk of torture, ill-treatment, threats to their lives, or other serious human rights violations;
- urging the authorities to allow Riad 'Abdullah Laila immediate access to the UNHCR, legal representation and his relatives;

- expressing concern at the reports of Riad 'Abdallah Laila's ill-health and urging that he be given immediate access to any medical treatment he may require;
- calling for his release unless he is to be charged with a recognisably criminal offence and be given a prompt and fair trial.

To the Syrian authorities

- calling on the Syrian authorities, in the event that Riad 'Abdallah Laila is returned to Syria, not to subject him to torture or other ill-treatment;
- reminding the authorities that although they have a duty to bring suspected criminals to justice, this can only be achieved when correct procedures for arrest, investigation and fair trials are adhered to;
- reminding them that Riad 'Abdallah Laila should be given immediate access to a lawyer of his choice, visits from his relatives and immediate access to any medical treatment he may require.

APPEALS TO:

UAE authorities:

Minister of Interior

His Excellency Major-General Sheikh Saif bin Zayed al-Nahyan

Ministry of Interior

POB: 398

Abu Dhabi

Fax: +971 2 441 4938

Salutation: Your Excellency

Syrian authorities:

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

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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 United Arab Emirates / Syria accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 June 2006.