

PUBLIC

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15 July 2005

Further Information on UA 188/03 (MDE 24/021/2003, 26 June 2003) and follow-ups (MDE 24/067/2004, 15 October 2004; MDE 24/035/2003, 18 September 2003; MDE 24/049/2004, 29 June 2004) - Prisoners of conscience/torture and ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/unfair trial/medical concern

SYRIA	Mas'oud Hamid (m), student	
	Muhammad Mustafa (m), lawyer]
	Khaled Ahmed 'Ali (m)] released
	Sherif Ramadhan (m)]

Muhammad Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali and Sherif Ramadhan were released at the end of June, when they completed their sentences. Mas'oud Hamid remains in 'Adra Prison, just outside the capital, Damascus. He has reportedly been suffering severe after-effects from being tortured during interrogation.

All were arrested in June and July 2003, during and after a peaceful demonstration to mark World Children's Day outside the Damascus headquarters of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. The demonstrators were calling for civil and political rights for Syria's Kurdish population, including the right to be taught in the Kurdish language.

The three men who have now been freed had been sentenced by the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) on 27 June 2004 to five years' imprisonment, which was immediately reduced to two years. They had been convicted of membership of a "secret organisation" and "attempting to sever part of Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state".

The SSSC sentenced Mas'oud Hamid to five years' imprisonment on 10 October 2004, on the same charges. The two years he has already spent in prison will count towards his sentence. He was apparently arrested because he took photographs of the demonstration and posted them on several internet sites. He was reportedly tortured during interrogation. As a result he suffers from severe headaches and dizziness. His glasses were broken, and when he asked for an eye test so he could have new glasses, the prison doctor told him he was not short-sighted. The state of his health had been causing concern, but it is now said to have improved. He has apparently not been given adequate medical treatment, beyond ibuprofen for the headaches, but is receiving monthly visits from his family.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The widespread use of torture in Syrian prisons and detention centres is well documented. Over the years, Amnesty International has recorded at least 38 different methods of torture employed by Syrian security officers. Muhammad Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali, Sherif Ramadhan and Mas'oud Hamid were all tortured during their interrogation by the Political Security Branch. At least one of them was reportedly tortured after the interrogation had been completed, as punishment for his complaining about prison conditions and for requesting legal representation to make a complaint about his treatment when he was sentenced by the SSSC. The torture included the method known as the *dulab* (whereby the victim is forced inside a large tyre which is turned around till the person is upside down and then beaten with sticks or whips); beating the soles of the feet; beating the wrists with sticks, leaving scarring; and kicking in the chest. The prisoners were also subjected to a stream of verbal abuse of a racial and sexual nature.

Trials before the SSSC fall far short of international standards for fair trial: there are severe restrictions on defendants' right to obtain effective legal representation and convicted prisoners have no right of appeal to a

higher court. Amnesty International has voiced concerns over the years that the SSSC appears to be neither independent nor impartial. It routinely accepts "confessions" without investigating claims that they have been extracted under torture or duress.

Many thanks to all who took action on this case. Amnesty International will continue to campaign on behalf of Mas'oud Hamid, through a longer-term action form. If you wish to do so, please send a final round of appeals, in English, Arabic, French or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to release Mas'oud Hamid immediately, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his beliefs;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that Masoud Hamid is not subjected to further torture or ill-treatment and reminding them that they are a state party to the UN Convention Against Torture;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that Mas'oud Hamid receives any medical attention he may require, and visits from his lawyer;
- expressing concern that Muhammad Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed 'Ali and Sherif Ramadhan spent two years as prisoners of conscience, held solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

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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 26 August 2005.