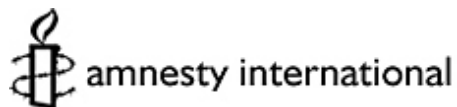


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Kurdish folk singer in Syria goes missing after arrest

Amnesty International is urging Syrian authorities to reveal the whereabouts of a Kurdish folk singer apparently detained for promoting traditional Kurdish music amid fears he could be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

'Abd al-Rahman Mohammed 'Omar, popularly known as Bavê Selah, was reportedly last seen accompanied by Syrian security agents at Aleppo hospital, north-west Syria, in early February.

"'Abd al-Rahman 'Omar is not known to be affiliated with any political organization and his arrest may be based solely on his promotion of traditional Kurdish music," said Philip Luther, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

"If this is the case, he would be a prisoner of conscience and Amnesty International would call for his immediate and unconditional release."

The family of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Omar fear the singer, who suffers from diabetes and was confined to his bed at the time of his arrest on 24 January, could be being denied regular medication for his condition.

'Abd al-Rahman 'Omar is a popular artist who regularly attends international music festivals and concerts. He has been arrested in the past for his involvement with traditional Kurdish music.

Kurds comprise up to 10 per cent of the population of Syria where they face systematic discrimination, including restrictions on the use of their language in schools and a ban on producing and circulating Kurdish music.

Seven people have reportedly died in custody in Syria since January 2010, possibly as a result of abuse. The government has not indicated publicly whether the deaths are being investigated.