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Syrian Human Rights Committee

**Annual Report on Human Rights
Situation in Syria 2006**
(Covering the period from June 2005 to May 2006)

June 2006

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First: Preface

Human Rights in Syria reached its lowest point since Bashar Al-Asad became President in mid-2000, when security and intelligence forces carried out widespread arrests in mid-May 2006, including 16 political opposition figures and civil society and human rights activists, after they had signed a petition calling for Syria to normalise its relations with Lebanon.

The state of human rights became extremely poor in mid March 2006, after authorities arrested scores of Kurds who had been peacefully celebrating Eid Nawrouz, in Aleppo and the North Eastern regions of Syria.

During this year and in an unprecedented manner, the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC), carried forward sentences criminalizing membership of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in accordance to Law No. 49/1980 which deems this a crime punishable by death, thus passing sentences of death by execution against a minor, an elderly man who had spent a third of his life-time imprisoned and a third man who has no connection with the movement, apart from neighboring a member.

The wave of detentions targeted hundreds of Islamists of all orientations, whom then stood trial before the SSSC in groups, while the detentions of those returning from foreign exile continued unabated despite their cases being settled with respective Syrian Consulates prior to their return.

This year also saw an unprecedented wave of detention campaigns against political opposition figures, reformists and human rights and civil society activists. These random detentions continued throughout the year with no reason whatsoever apart from these individual expressing their views, peacefully congregating, upholding human rights or demanding democratic reforms throughout the country.

The exceptional judicial system was activated in a step unheard of in the history of the Syrian Judiciary, as the SSSC and military courts issued a considerable number of draconian sentences against political opposition figures, civil society and human rights activists as well as Islamic and Kurdish detainees among many others.

A number of media workers and correspondents also faced arrest, oppression and harassment, whilst the regime continued to monopolise all forms of media and the internet.

The Syrian authorities also continued to use torture as a routine and systematic method of extracting confessions during interrogation and punishing dissidents and exacting revenge against them. Methods of torture adopted by the security authorities vary from the conventional to the most barbaric and sophisticated.

Second: Detentions

2.1 - Extra-Judicial Detentions

Extra-judicial detentions without a proper arrest warrant or any acceptable legal justification, are common in Syria, as each security authority enjoys the right to detain citizens and interrogate them, subjecting them to torture and humiliating treatment. Often detainees will suffer serious illnesses, long-term disabilities or even death under torture or as a result thereof, without there being any legal or judicial recourse or investigation.

Security forces in Deir Al-Zour arrested the citizens: Murshid Ihsan Al-Alaya, Ameer Al-Hreib ibn Ahmed Al-Hammadi, Abdulsattar Khidr Al-Shlashon the 27th of June 2005. Political Security also arrested dozens of high school and university students in Homs during the first week of the same month. The arrests targeted the refugee camp and Al-Shammas which lie on the Damascus Road near Al-Ba'th University. Military Security arrested Mohammed Al-Jaja and Najeh Hawan, both from Hama. On the 3rd of September 2005, the same division also arrested Hamza Abdullah Al-Ahmed from the village of Qamhana in the province of Hama. In mid-September 2005, Mohammed Kamil Al-Hussein (Born Aleppo, 1972) was arrested in Aleppo and his personal computer was confiscated along with a number of CDs, along with Hashem Al-Sheikh ibn Ahmed Al-Abdullah (Aleppo, 1962), an Engineer at the Centre for Scientific Research and Ahmed Abdullah Al-Moosa (1976). Basem Isa Al-Saeed (Al-Raqqa Province) on the 20th of September 2005, who has been paralyzed since childhood, was also arrested. Mahmood Ahmed Taha, from Sayyida Zainab in Damascus was summoned to Political Security on the 24th of September 2005, and has never returned home. Security and Intelligence authorities also arrested a number of citizens on the 28th of September 2005, including among others, Mohammed Darwish Barbour (30 years old) who works as head of the Computer department in the General Establishment of the Euphrates Dam (Al-Thawra, Al-Raqqa Province). On the next day, Mohammed Ijlwi ibn I'shuwi was abducted from the street opposite the Ba'th Party branch, whilst Isa Al-Shawwakh, a student at Medical College in Aleppo University was also arrested along with Ismail Al-Shawwakh Al-Humoud, a post-graduate student at Aleppo University, Khaled****, a university student and Ahmed Ismail ibn Hamad (23 years old) a university student at the Economics college, who was arrested from the Aleppo university campus. The Military Security authority arrested Mahmoud

Abdulrahman, a solicitor from Hama province in early October, without explaining their actions or informing his family. The Air force Intelligence arrested a number of citizens on the 12th of October 2005 including Hilal Hameed Awar, a retired teacher who sells books on the street, and Yaser Khalil Al-Ali (26 years old), both from Al-Raqqa. In mid-October Ahmed ibn Sami Qtei' was arrested on the Syrian borders near the city of Dar'a, as he returned to Syria from Saudi Arabia. In early November, security forces arrested Mohammed Al-Dibis from Hama, Fadi Shamma' and Salah Hayek, both from Aleppo for unknown reasons. Later in that month, Syrian security authorities arrested Dr. Mahmoud Al-Rashed (Hama) as he arrived at an entry-point on the Iraqi borders. In late November, Mahmoud Yusuf, a student of Law at Aleppo University was arrested for unknown reasons. On the 10th of December 2005, the Military Intelligence arrested Mohammed Ammar Al-Sayyid (24 years old) having raided his house and confiscated his personal computer and a number of CDs. Military Security arrested Osama Akr on the 25th of December 2005 after he had openly called for the reimbursement of rights to those dealt unjustly at Abu Bakr Al-Siddique mosque in Ma'damiyyat Al-Sham. Military Security also arrested Mohammed Nouri Uday, a Law student on the 20th of December 2005. On the 23rd of December, security authorities arrested Ghiyath Habbab, a tourist guide, was abducted from in front of the SSSC in Damascus. It is thought that at the time, he was leading a tourist group and pointing to the Court. Mr. Habbab was referred to the Political Security in Damascus to ascertain whether or not the charge of insulting the President stands. Security authorities re-arrested Baha' Mustafa Jaghl (born 1976) from his house in Damascus on the 24th of December, having released him 6 months earlier. Mr. Al-Jaghl was previously detained in Pakistan from which he was deported in 2002. State Security Intelligence arrested Mohammed Bakour Shiehan (from Tizin) in early January 2006, whilst security authorities at Qamashli arrested Hadi Ibrahim Allo of Al-Dirbasiyya on the 7th of January. On the 14th of January, State Security Intelligence arrested Fahad Da'doush, an Aleppo municipal council worker from Ma'ratmasreen, Idlib. After five days of detention in Idlib, he was transferred to Damascus. On the 14th, Bashar Adnan Halabiyya, a driver was arrested. Security authorities arrested Husam Ali Milhim, a Law student from Dreikeish (born 1984) and Ali Nazeer Ali, Business Administration student from Misyaf (1984) on the 24th of January. On the 7th of February 2006, Political Security arrested the writer Adil Tawfiq Mahfouz (50 years old) from his house in Tartous. On the 19th of February, the Harasta branch of Air Force Intelligence, summoned

Tariq Al-Ghourani, and then raided his house upon his refusal to attend the summons. Political Security on Tartous raided the vessel (Atallah 2) at Tartous port on the 22nd of February and arrested First Captain Mustafa Shaweesh after insulting him. Captain Shaweesh was detained at the civil prison in Tartous and then brought before the court charged with insulting figures of authorities in the state. Security authorities arrested Maher Ibrahim Isbir (26 years old), Allam Fakhour, a university graduate of Arts and Ayham Saqr, Barber, all from Al-Salmiya on the 24th of February. On the 26th of February, Members of the Bab Al-Siba' Police force in Homs raided the house of Abdullah Shantout and arrested his daughter; Shadha. She was detained at the police station until the 1st of March after which she was brought before an investigation judge who ordered her release. However, 10 days passed without her being released. SHRC has no information on whether or not she was eventually released. On the 9th of March, Mahmoud Hamsho, a member of People's Council (Parliament) was arrested along with a number of his companies' directors. While Hamsho was released a few hours later, the others, including his brother and some of his relatives, were kept for longer. Intelligence forces arrested a man of over 70 years old called Waleed Al-Kabir, from Quneitra, as he was sitting in Al-Rawda coffee shop in Damascus on the 20th of March, after a discussion with some friends regarding recent developments in Syria. On the same day, a university student; Mohammed Khaled Jad'an from Joseph village in Idlib was also arrested, but for unknown reasons. On the 27th of March, an armed group of 7 raided an embroidery factory in Aleppo, and arrested Waddah Mahmoud Nasri, handcuffing him in view of everyone. The same group then searched his house and took him to an unknown location. On the 3rd of April, security authorities arrested Sami Al-Abbas (a former Officer and currently a writer) and Farooq Hammad, an employee in the Foreign Trade Establishment in Tartous who is known for his poetic writings. Both were released the next day, having been told that their arrest was because they had met with opposition figures. Syrian authorities arrested Shihab Shahoud and Haitham Qatreeb on the 10th of April in Salamiya town in Hama. Both were former prisoners, the first spending 9 years and the second 12 because they were members of the Democratic Ba'th Party. In Damascus on the 14th of April, Saeed ibn Mahmoud Al-Barghouti, member of Liaison Bureau of the Arab Nationalists Movement, was arrested and charged with insulting and criticizing the authorities after a verbal argument at a restaurant in Rural Damascus province. Security authorities arrested Riyadh Awwad Al-Hamad Al-Kurdi of Moohasan in Dier Al-Zour, because he

had aired his views on economic development of rural areas to the Assistant to the Prime Minister.

2.1- Political, civil society and human rights activists

The campaign against political, civil society and human rights activists increased this year. High ranking security officials were reported to have informed the 10th Ba'th Party congress held last summer that a campaign soon to be launched aimed at suppressing activities throughout Syria calling for the reinstatement of human rights and democracy to Syrian society, after an absence of more than 43 years. Syrian authorities launched the most brutal and fierce wave of arrests witnessed since Bashar Al-Asad became president. Over the course of one week, authorities had arrested more than 16 political, civil society and human rights activists without any justification. On the 14th of May 2006, the writer, journalist and civil activist, Michel Kilo was arrested because he has signed the Beirut-Damascus Declaration which calls on the Syrian authorities to normalize relations with Lebanon. On the 16th of May, security authorities arrested the solicitor Mahmoud Mar'i, Secretary of the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria and Nidal Darwish, a member of the Committees for the Defence of Freedoms and Human Rights in Syria. The very next day, the campaign threw its nets further a field and arrested Dr. Safwan Tayfour, Mahmoud Isa, Khaled Khalifa, Khaleel Hussein, and Khaled Omar, member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, Anwar Al-Bunni, Human Rights activist in addition to activists Abbas Abbas, Kamal Sheikho and Suleiman Shammar. On the 18th of May, and within the same case remit, Mohammed Mahfoud of the Attasi Forum for Democratic Dialogue was arrested. Exceptional and ordinary courts charged with serious offences ranging from inciting sectarian hatred to weakening the national morals, which carries a maximum prison sentence of life with hard labour. Fateh Jamoos, the political activist, leading member of the Communist Labour Party and former prisoner was arrested on the 1st of May as he landed at Damascus airport following a visit to a number of European countries, in which he took part in a number of seminars and lectures on the Syrian situation. Jamoos was referred to the courts who charged him with inciting a civil war and sectarian violence as well as leading an armed militant group, offences which carry a maximum life prison sentence, although he had already spent 18 years of life in prison. Mohammed Hasan Dheeb was arrested without trial on the

26th of May, 2005, charged with weakening the national morals, contempt of court and possessing data retrieved from the internet. The Islamic researcher and civil society activist, Riyadh Darrar was also arrested on the 4th of June 2005, following an obituary he had delivered for Sheikh Mohammed Ma'shouq Al-Khaznawi, who was abducted and later found killed. Darrar was sentenced to five years imprisonment on the 2nd of April 2006, having been found guilty of dispersing false information, inflaming racist tendencies and belonging to a secret organization. The Political Security branch in Homs arrested Hasan Zeino on the 10th of July, after searching a briefcase he was carrying containing issues of Al-Mawqif Al-Dimoqrati (The Democratic Stand) journal, which is published by the Democratic National Group. He was released two months later and now awaits trial charged with dispersing prohibited publications. Military Security authorities arrested the solicitor Mahmoud Abdulrahman from Hama in September 2005, for unknown reasons. Security authorities also arrested Dr. Mahmoud Sarim (68 years old) on the 19th of September 2005, who went on hunger strike inside prison in early December in protest against the continuation of his extra-judicial detention. On the 18th of November, the activist and former detainee, Kamal Al-Labwani was arrested upon his arrival at Damascus airport from a tour in Europe and the US. Political Security forces arrested the author Adil Tawfiq Mahfoud (50 years old) at his home in Tartous in a humiliating and degrading manner in front of his wife and children, for unknown reasons. Military Security forces arrested the solicitor Mohammed Najati Tayyara, Vice Chair of the Human Rights Society in Syria, on the 14th of February. On the same day, State Security Intelligence summoned the journalist Hakam Al-Baba, then released him after several hours of interrogation. The same authorities also summoned the Member of Parliament and former detainee Riad Seif and released him after many hours of interrogation also. On the same day, the authorities forcefully detained Member of Parliament and former detainee Mohammed Ma'moun Al-Homsi, as he was about to leave his home and was kept until past midnight. Security authorities also arrested the human rights activist and media director for the Arab Organization for Human Rights, Ammar Qurabi on the 12th of March as he arrived at Damascus Airport from a trip to France and the US. He was released three days later and was referred to the SSSC. On Thursday the 23rd of March, Syrian authorities arrested activist and writer, Ali Al-Abdulla, for unknown reason. Al-Abdullah had been detained from the 15th of May to the 2nd of November 2005, and stood before the SSSC more than once because he had publicly read a

letter written by Ali Sadreddin Al-Bayanouni (Leader of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in Syria) to Al-Attasi Forum. Al-Abdullah was summoned to court along with his son. Mohammed on the 14th of May 2006 charged with congregating, inciting riots and insulting the court. His second son, Omar who was arrested a week earlier, was charged with the attempt of forming a youth organization. Sameer Al-Nashar, a lawyer and member of the Interim Committee of the Damascus Declaration was arrested at his office in Aleppo on the 25th of March, for unknown reasons, and was released two days later. Writer Fayez Al-Hallaq was arrested on Sunday 26th of March after reciting a poem which he had written and was referred to the Military judiciary the very next day. Furthermore, Hilal Rajab, member of the Democratic Labour Committee in Latakia on Monday 27th of March, and was released around midnight of the same day. Writer Mohammed Ghanem, editor of 'Suriyyoun' website on the 31st of March, having been previously arrested on the 12th of March and detained for 15 days at the Palestine branch. Informed sources confirmed that Mr. Ghanem was subject to physical and mental torture during his detention. Novelist Sami Al-Abbas and poet Farooq Hamad were both arrested on the 3rd of April charged with meeting with other opposition figures. Intelligence forces arrested the writer and university student Abdullah Al-Hallaq at his home in Al-Salamiya in Hama as a result of his public activities. Security authorities arrested Saeed ibn Mahmoud Al-Barghouti, member of the Liaison Office of the Arab Nationalist Movement on the 14th of April in Damascus. He was charged with insulting and defaming the authorities, following a verbal exchange in a restaurant in Rural Damascus. It is worth noting that Al-Barghouti suffers very poor health. On the 17th of April, Mohammed Saleh and Muti' Mansour Al-Attasi were both arrested because they had been distributing a statement issued by the Union of Syrian Communists commemorating the Independence Day. Al-Attasi was later released, whilst Saleh remains in detention. Security authorities in Al-Salamiya arrested human rights activist Hussein Dawood on the 18th of April and took him to an unknown location.

2.3- Citizens returning from exile

Syrian authorities have long exercised the detention of citizens returning from exile, and nothing changed over the course of the past year, arresting men as well as women and children. On most occasions, men are kept in

detention for lengthy periods, after which they are brought before the SSSC which passes brutal sentences. Most of the returnees are categorized as either supporters or members of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. On the 13th of July 2005, female citizen Subhiya Farhat was arrested upon her return to Syria for the first time in 26 years spent in exile. Yusuf Mohammed Ahmed Qarmu was also arrested upon returning with his family from Iraq on the 25th of July, and was released on the 4th of September. Mohammed Abdulqader Al-Taweel was arrested upon his return from Iraq in the beginning of August and later released. Intelligence and security forces arrested Sheikh Abdulqader Al-Shawwaf (78 years old) on the 23rd of September 2005 upon his return from Saudi Arabia, where he went for medical treatment. No regard was offered to his age or to his critical state of health. Ahmed ibn Sami Qatti' was arrested at the Syrian Borders near Dara'a, as he was returning from Saudi Arabia in mid-October. Security forces also arrested Dr. Mahmoud Al-Rashid from Hama on the 15th of November upon his arrival at an entry point on the Iraqi borders. Abduljabbar Ahmed Al-Allawi (30 years old) from Abu Al-Zuhour in Idlib province was arrested in March upon his arrival at a border point from Iraq, where he lives with his wife and children. His wife and children were released, but Al-Allawi remains in detention with no information on either his condition or where he is detained.

2.4- Tahrir Party

The wave of arrests against members of Islamic Tahrir party continued unabated this year. The late President Hafez Al-Asad had initiated the campaign of persecution and oppression against the Tahrir Party members in 1998, as he arrested hundreds of them and presented them before extra ordinary courts which passed sentences ranging between 3 and 6 years. On the 9th of September, Intelligence forces arrested a number of Tahrir party members as they were distributing a party statement. These forces then raided a number of houses and confiscated computers and printers, as well as amounts of money claimed to belong to the Tahrir party. The party revealed the names of those arrested: Ahmed Salim Ayyub, Law student at Damascus University, Osama Hasan Musa, a laborer from Aleppo, Bilal Atnouj, also a laborer from Aleppo, Abdullah Mahmoud Al-Sheikh, Arabic teacher from Damascus, and Dr. Walid Khalid Al-Saeed, lecturer at Al-Fath Al-Islami Institute in Damascus. Over the past ten days of April, 2006, Taysir

Mohammed Jalal Na'san, an electrical engineer and his colleague, physics teacher Ghassan Makkawi were both arrested and charged with being members of Tahrir party. Neither the authority that carried out the arrest nor the locations where they are detained are known.

2.5- Islamists

The Syrian security apparatus considers the Islamists and the Islamic trend generally, as its first and foremost enemy, hence they remain in a state of preparedness to persecute and assault Islamists of all trends and denominations. Security and intelligence forces usually arrest groups and individuals and keep them incarcerated for two or three years, during which they are subject to interrogation by the most brutal divisions, and to torture of the most inhumane nature, after which they are indicted and given prolonged and brutal sentences.

In early September 2005, authorities arrested two brothers, Ibrahim and Hamid Al-Tiyawi from the Eastern Region due to their Islamic tendencies, after which they were transferred to Damascus via Deir Ezzor. Intelligence forces arrested Sheikh Abdul Qader Al-Shawwaf (78 years old), an Imam and former inspector of mosques throughout the province of Hama, on the 23rd of September 2005. Another wave of arrests took place in mid-October in a number of villages near Houran, on the premise that those arrested belonged to the Salafi trend including Yusuf Abdu Al-Bayyumi, Ahmed Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi and Yusuf Ali Al-Nawfal, and were kept at the Palestine branch for Military interrogation.

Five citizens from Rural Damascus province were arrested due to their religious tendencies, and were detained at the Fayha' branch. The five were: Siraj Khalbous (19 years old), who was delivered to his family in an appalling state suffering paralysis due the severity of torture that he was subject to, Mohammed Ismail Al-Dojj (19 years old), Mohammed Anas Al-Turk (18 years old), Abdulrahman Al-Salti and Wisam Al-Ghourani. There were also significant arrest campaigns which claimed citizens from the cities and towns of Duma, Darwasha, Khan Al-Sheikh, Skeika to Hasaka and Qamishli, most of whom were notable for their religious tendencies. Authorities carried out widespread arrests in Houran over the third week of April, claiming 16 victims. On one occasion, authorities raided the workplaces and homes of those it wanted to arrest, amongst whom was the

human rights activist Mus'ab Al-Jahmani. The real motives for this campaign remain unknown, although learned sources claim that it is because the detainees are of religious tendencies. On the 24th of December, security authorities re-arrested Baha' Mustafa Jaghl from his home in Damascus, and there are other detainees whose names are mentioned in the paragraph titled 'SSSC trials' herein, and many others whose names were not mentioned as they are yet to be identified.

2.6- Relatives and Hostages

Holding relatives of dissidents and opposition figures hostage has long become a customary form of action adopted by the Syrian security apparatus. On the 27th of July 2005, security and intelligence forces arrested Mohammed Ali Al-Abdullah from his home in Qatana (Rural Damascus Province). Al-Abdullah is the son of Ali Al-Abdullah who was arrested in mid-May 2005, and had participated in establishing a committee of the relatives of detainees demanding the release of father. During the same period, Yasin Al-Hamwi, father of Haitham Al-Hamwi, who was already detained. A Police force also held in custody more than ten people on the 13th of November, all of whom were relatives of detainees, and who had gathered in front of the SSSC in Damascus along with around 200 other relatives of Kurdish and Otaiba area detainees (14 detainees), demanding visitation rights. Anti-riot police attacked the congregation with batons and sticks, failing to distinguish between man and woman, young and old. Those detained were released a few hours later. Siraj Khalbous, was arrested and brutally tortured until he was paralysed, had his father summoned by the security forces in November and subject to humiliating and degrading treatment as well as serious threats, in order to make a public statement that his son had been ill before security forces arrested him. Security forces also arrested Ghazi Daleela, brother of Dr. Arif Daleela who has been in detention since 2001, after his family home was attacked by a mob carrying knives and batons supported by influential security and tribal sources. His son Shadi Daleela, an Engineer (30 years old) was seriously wounded and had to be placed in intensive care, while his sister Sameera Daleela, suffered bruises and was subject to a torrent of abuse and threats. Intelligence and security forces arrested three women in early September, whose husbands had went into hiding. It has since been confirmed that Rula Al-Khaled, who was pregnant, Nadiya Al-Satour along with her daughter of a

few months old and Hiba Al-Khaled, also pregnant, all from Hama province, were arrested and referred to a security branch until their husbands surrender themselves to security authorities. Air Force intelligence authorities arrested the youngster Razeen Mo'eena, brother of detainee Bara' Mo'eena (from Al-Tal town, Rural Damascus) on Sunday 19th of February 2006, whilst on the 7th of March, Mohammed Riyadh Darrar, was arrested after distributing a statement in which he called for the release of his father Riyadh Darrar. During the same period, a number of youngsters under 20 years old in uniform serving their mandatory military service, were arrested and subject to brutal beatings and torture in order to extract information about relatives of theirs who live either in Syria or abroad, and in order to use them as bait to capture those relatives.

2.7- Arab detainees in Syrian prisons

The Syrian regime is considered amongst the most intrusive in the affairs of foreign nationals, often carrying out inexplicable campaigns against foreign students, residents or visitors to Syria. Syria also receives non-Syrian detainees extradited to Syria for interrogation, torture and internment. There are currently a number of detainees from neighbouring countries, from the Arab Gulf region and from North Africa.

The case of missing Lebanese citizens remains stagnant. Before relations between the two countries hit its lowest point in 2005, the Syrian part presented elaborations on 88 of whom Syria termed, 'Lebanese criminals held in Syrian prisons'. The Lebanese part presented to its Syrian counterpart queries regarding a list submitted that carried the names of 850 Lebanese citizens who went missing over the many years of Military Syrian presence in Lebanon.

Somali university student Mustafa Omar Abdi Malik (19 years old) was arrested at his home in Harasta district near Damascus on the 6th of September and was transferred to Al-Fayha' branch of Political Security. Members of the force searched his home and confiscated his personal computer. Two Algerian students Abdul Haq Mahamdiya and Jalal Badees disappeared after their arrest in October 2005. Despite their respective families contacting the Algerian Embassy in Damascus, no information regarding their whereabouts and conditions has been presented by the Syrian authorities. On the 15th of September, Syrian authorities arrested

Saeed Awda Al-Saki and kept him at the Palestine Branch for military interrogation. Al-Saki is an Arab from Al-Ahwaz area which currently falls under Iranian mandate, and had left Iran two years ago being pursued by Iranian authorities after seeing four of his colleagues executed for their political activity in demanding full rights of Arabs in Al-Ahwaz. In a serious development, Al-Saki was extradited to Iran in May 2006, a matter which puts his life in grave danger. On the 11th of May, 7 Ahwaz Arabs were arrested amid fears that they also would be handed over to Iranian authorities to be executed. They are: Faleh Abdullah Al-Mansouri who is of Dutch nationality, Taher Ali Mazra'a, Rasool Ali Mazra'a, Musa Mahdi Swari, Isa Al-Yasin, Ahmed Abdul Jabbar Abiyat, Jamal Obeidawi, all of whom have attained refugee status from the UN High Commission of Refugees in Damascus. Jad Tayseer Subhi, a Bahraini student completing his studies in Jordan was arrested on the 7th of January, after a colleague of his in touch with Syrian intelligence, lured him to visit Syria where he was arrested and kept despite his family's assurance that he belonged to no political organization whatsoever. The SSSC passed a 3 year prison sentence against Jordanian (of Palestinian origin) Abu Mayyala followed by deportation from Syria after finding him guilty of contempt of the State's stature. Palestinian Saleh Mohammed Omar was abducted from Ain Al-Helwa refugee camp in Lebanon in 2004, and was later found to be detained at the Political Security branch in Syria.

2.8- Releases

On the 2nd of November 2005, 190 political detainees were released by virtue of a Presidential pardon. SHRC managed to document 137 names thereof, many of whom were arrested in the 80s and had spent more than quarter of a century in infamous prisons and detention camps (names available on the SHRC website). Previously, 10 had also been released on different dates, most of whom had been detained in the 80s of the previous century (names available on SHRC website). It had been announced that 312 detainees were to have been released, however authorities did not release all those officially announced. Hussein Al-Aoudat and seven others from Al-Attasi Forum were released on the 30th of May 2005, six days after being detained. In late June 2005, Mahmoud Mustafa, Khaled Ahmed and Ali and Shareef Ramadhan were released having served their respective prison sentences, whilst Abdulrahman Al-Shaghouri was released on the

31st of August 2005, after serving two and a half years in Sednaya military prison for dispersing news to some of his acquaintances through e-mail. Mohammed Abdulqader Al-Taweel, who is a returning citizen from Iraq, was also released in early August of 2005, as was Yusuf Mohammed Ahmed Qarmu on the 4th of September 2005, who was also arrested as he was returning from Iraq with his family on the 25th of July. Ziyad Tahhan, Ziyad Ismail and Nayef Al-Ahmed were released on the 11th of October having served their prison sentence for 'engaging the country in wars which it could not bear', as the group, also known as the Golan group, were convicted of intending to carry out military operations on the Syrian-Israeli borders. Syrian authorities released Lebanese detainees in November, including George Shlaweet (detained for 13 years), Danny Abdullah and Yehia Al-Andouri. On the 2nd of November, writer and journalist Ali Al-Abdullah was released, only to be re-arrested in March 2006. Syrian authorities also released 5 detainees from Damascus Spring on the 18th of November; Members of Parliament Riyadh Seif and Ma'moun Al-Homsi along with Dr. Fawwaz Tello, Walid Al-Bunni and lawyer Habib Isa. On the 15th of March 2006, human rights activist and media spokesman for the Arab Organization for Human Rights Ammar Al-Qurabi was released after spending three days in detention after returning from a visit abroad, yet his case was referred to SSSC.

Third: Law 49/1980

The sentences that were passed this year highlight notable validation of Law 49/1980, which was passed on the 7th of July 1980. The First Article of this law criminalizes the mere joining or sympathizing with the Muslim Brotherhood Movement punishable by death. The Fifth Article stipulates that this is to be implemented retroactively; hence detainees held before the issuance of the law will have no course to readdress their sentences or seek a pardon. The former Information Minister Adnan Omran stated a number of years ago that this law had long been frozen and of no effect, yet sentences passed by the SSSC this year and the past, affirm that this law has been returned to a state of effect, a matter that has left no doubt in the message that the regime in Syria wishes to send to the Syrian people and the entire world. It is also worth noting in this context that around 17,000 Syrians of all walks of life had perished in prisons throughout the country as a result of this law. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement and their supporters were executed retrospectively even before this law was passed, while SHRC documented the names of 4000 missing people (available on the SHRC website). A number of massacres which claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people throughout Syria were committed under the pretext of this law between 1979 and 1982. On the 2nd of April 2006, Abdulsattar Qattan, an Engineer, was sentenced to death by virtue of this law, later reduced to 12 years imprisonment, despite Qattan being previously detained twice for a total of 17 years. His latest charge was that he had been carrying an amount of money intended as financial assistance for the family of one of those missing since the 1980s, and who have no source of financial support. On the 2nd of December 2005, Omar Darwish, detained by Syrian security forces from inside the Iraqi borders as he was attempting to find a safe haven for his family from the effects of the war in 2003, was sentenced to death under this law charged of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. SHRC has ascertained that Mr. Darwish has no link with the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, apart from living as a neighbour to a number of MBM members in Iraq.

The SSSC sentenced youngster Mus'ab Al-Hariri in accordance with the said law on the 19th of June 2005, despite Al-Hariri being born in Saudi Arabia. Al-Hariri's father had sent him to Syria to continue his studies, but was arrested by Syrian authorities and sentenced to death, later reduced to a prison sentence. SHRC considers this sentence as being one passed

against a hostage, in the regime's attempt to bait and target the families and children of Syrian dissidents and opposition figures. Al-Hariri's lawyer proved beyond doubt that her client had no relationship whatsoever with the Muslim Brotherhood Movement or any other party, which fell on the court's deaf ears. SSSC had previously sentenced Mohammed Ahmed Al-Afandi and Mahmoud Ali Al-Nabhan to death and later reduced the sentence to 12 years imprisonment in accordance with this law. A number of detainees who had returned from exile or were forced to return from Iraq in 2003, subject to being tried under this law, most prominent amongst them is Mohammed Osama Sayes who was deported by British authorities having refused him the right to political asylum. Sayes is presently held in Sednaya prison and awaits to stand before the SSSC, knowing full well the fate that awaits him.

It is worth noting in this context that the sentences passed against the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, are the most severe amongst all other political detainees, despite the variances of charges against them respectively.

The Muslim Brotherhood movement have been carrying out a humanitarian campaign over recent months to annul this draconian law, and have initiated a significant signature campaign on a petition calling for the annulment of this law which defies the most basic humanitarian maxims. SHRC is also joining efforts to annul this and other laws which aim to exterminate the other.

Fourth: The Kurds

Syrian authorities continue to oppress Syrian Kurds, preventing them from their basic rights to preserve their language, heritage, culture and festivities as well as preventing many of enjoying the nationality of their country. Despite the numerous promises made by Syrian authorities that 100,000 Kurds are on the verge of reclaiming Syrian nationality which they have been prevented from enjoying, nothing has materialized over the past year and a half since these pledges were made. Although President Bashar Al-Asad recognized openly and publicly that Kurds represent the second largest ethnic community in Syria, his words never transformed into tangible policies. On the contrary, around 100 Kurds were arrested during the Candle March which took place on the evening of the 20th of March 2006, 37 of whom were referred to the SSSC for merely celebrating Nawrouz festival, which constitutes part of Kurdish heritage and culture. While the events of March 2004 continue to cast a long shadow upon the political and humanitarian arena, Syrian authorities seem oblivious to concerns, as they continue to hold detainees being tried before SSSC and military courts as a result of those events. Despite official claims, none of the detainees were released despite statements that President Al-Asad issued a pardon pertaining to 312 Kurdish detainees in 2005.

Security authorities arrested 47 Kurdish citizens along with 12 minors on charges of inciting disorder and racial tensions as well as defaming public figures. This came in the aftermath of a march that took place in Qamishli on the 5th of June 2005, in protest against the abduction and killing of Sheikh Al-Khaznawi. In early December, Syrian authorities arrested 11 Syrian Kurds in Qamishli on charges of belonging to an Islamic Salafi group. A young Kurd was also arrested after defending his sister who was subject to verbal harassment from a policeman.

On the 16th of February 2006, security authorities arrested the Syrian Kurd Faheem Sheikho (31 years old) from Afreet village in Dirbasiyya district, upon his arrival at Damascus Airport from Germany. Security Authorities also arrested a large number of members and supporters of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party during 2005 (list of names available on the SHRC website). According to the Party, 56 of those arrested are yet to be referred to the judiciary, while 4 minors were previously arrested and referred to the Primary Investigation Judge in Aleppo. Three Kurds were also arrested in

Aleppo, while 42 were detained by security authorities and referred to the SSSC in Damascus, bringing the total number of detainees this year alone to 105. The SHRC is satisfied that the numbers of Kurdish detainees is far greater than that, as a large number of supporters of the same party were also detained in March of last year, 45 of whom remain in detention until now. Further, the lawyer Soubast Sheikh Zada was arrested and detained at the Political Security in Aleppo, during the peaceful candle march on the 20th of March 2006 which security authorities oppressed. The same security authority arrested Jihan Mohammed Ali, Adnan Khalil Rasheed, Wahid Jihad Mustafa and Fawzi Ali Qahwa in Aleppo on the 19th of April, for unknown reasons, and were all taken to unknown locations (a list of the Kurdish detainees throughout 2005 is available).

Fifth: Torture and Death in Prisons and Interrogation Centers

5.1- Torture and Abuse

Syrian authorities employ physical and mental torture as well as other degrading methods on a systematic and routine basis, particularly during the initial periods after arrest. Such methods -amounting to more than 40 approved torturing methods used in interrogation centers, custody cells and prisons- and are used in the cases of political detainees as they are used in the case of criminal detainees, and irrespective of whether the subject was a minor. Many detainees ultimately lose a limb or one of his or her senses, or may become permanently disabled. In some cases, detainees have died under torture or as a result thereof. No information has ever emerged on holding individuals implicated in such activities or methods responsible, indeed legislation absolves such individuals from the rule of law, as they are considered to be carrying out official duty to which they are assigned. Nor has any indication been noted regarding the improvement of conditions or the reduction of torturing methods at the Palestine Branch for Military Interrogation, or Al-Fayha' Branch or Al-Mantiqa Branch or any other intelligence and security center.

Mohammed Shaher Haysa (Souran, Hama – 26 years old) died in April 2006 in one of the security interrogation centers in Damascus as a result of severe torture to which he was subjected over the many months he was held. He had been arrested due to his Islamic tendencies. Ahmed ibn Sulaiman Al-Hilali from Qamishli (19 years old) came under severe torture during interrogation. Al-Hilali has been in detention for many months now for unknown reasons. In late October of 2005, Political Security Branch delivered Siraj Khalbous to his family at the Ibn Al-Nafees hospital in Damascus in an extremely poor health condition, suffering from total paralysis and Tuberculosis and having endured a number of strokes, all of which were a result of the severe torture he had endured and which left clear scars on his entire body. Khalbous's father was summoned to a security branch and was forced to sign a document absolving security forces of any responsibility towards what his son had suffered during his detention. Along with Siraj, four of his colleagues, Mohammed Ismail Al-Dojj (19 years old, Douma), Mohammed Anas Al-Turk (19, Douma), Abdulrahman Al-Salti

(Douma) and Wisam Al-Ghourani (Al-Asad villages), were also arrested and were subject to torture of the most severe form.

Reports indicated that three members of Tahrir Party held at Sednaya prison were transferred to the infamous Air Force Intelligence branch, in order that more severe torture methods and more brutal and abusive treatment would be employed. Law student Mohammed Al-Haj Bakri was subject to the most horrific forms of physical and mental abuse at the Police station in Latakia on the 25th of May, simply because he has protested at the way in which a female colleague of his was treated at a hospital she was attending. He was only released after being forced to sign a statement that he was neither beaten nor abused. Reports also indicated that directives from high authorities in October 2005, ordered the hiding or destroying of documents held at interrogation centres, many of which pertain to torture and interrogation sessions against political detainees over no less than 30 years.

Further, Syrian Kurd and conscript Mohammed Weiso Ali, from Ain Al-Arab (born 1987) died at his military unit (Brigade 157) at Khirbat Al-Shiyyab on the 28th of March, after being subject to severe beating by physical trainers who forced him to run despite him being asthmatic.

Among the most renowned heads of security forces and intelligence bodies who employ widespread torture is Brigadier Asif Shawkat, Head of the Military Intelligence Apparatus, Brigadier Mohammed Mansoura, Head of Political Security Branch, Brigadier Ali Mamlouk, Head of General Intelligence (State Security) and Brigadier Izziddin Ismail, Head of Air Force Intelligence until April 2006, after which Brigadier Abdulfattah Qudsiyah became head. There are other branches within these complex bodies and which are also renowned for using torture, such as the Palestine branch for Militray Interrogation, Al-Fayha' branch and Al-Mantiqa branch.

5.2- Death in prison

In October 2005, Mohammed Ali Kirwan died in detention as a result of being left without due medical care, despite suffering chronic kidney disease. Kirwan was being held with others awaiting trial charged with being a member of the Nationalist Wing of the Ba'th Party. Hussein Mohammed Mahmoud died in Sednaya prison on the 12th of October, being suspected of being a member of a Palestinian faction. Adnan Ahmed Al-Sallal (50

years old) died on the 14th of August 2005 in Hama Central Prison as a result of being left for several hours without medical care after suffering heart attack, despite prison authorities knowing fully well that he had serious heart problems.

Yaser Meshmesh died in Sednaya prison on the 15th of December 2005 at the Tishreen Hosiptal. Meshmesh was transferred to the hospital ten days before his death following a mysterious incident in prison. Mohammed Shafer Haysa (26 years old) from Hama province died in April 2006 in one of the security interrogation centers in Damascus having been subject to severe torture during his detention which lasted several months. Haysa was originally detained due to his Islamic tendencies. These incidents which have been identified and verified constitute only a small proportion of those who die in prison and detention cells due to negligence alone.

Mohammed Ma'shouq Al-Kahznawi was abducted from his home in Damascus on the 10th of May 2005, and later died as a result of the severe torture he was subjected to at the hands of his abductors. When found his beard shaven and his body was severely mutilated so that even his family could barely identify him. His body was found in Deir Ezzor 20 days later. There is a very strong suspicion backed by documents and hard evidence that some security authorities are responsible for this horrific crime, due to Al-Khaznawi's strong stand on Kurdish rights on one hand and because of his meeting with the leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood Movement 3 months earlier, on the other.

Sixth: Supreme State Security Court Dossier

6.1- Sentences passed by the SSSC

The SSSC convened on a frequent basis throughout this year, and passed sentences on scores of detainees for political or human rights reasons, while hundreds others continue to await their unjust sentences. It is also noteworthy that this court is targeting two categories with the most brutal sentences: Islamists and Alawi dissidents.

The SSSC is an extra-ordinary legal structure whose sentences cannot be appealed or contested, and relies in passing its sentences on security authorities' minutes and reports, which are normally extracted from suspects forcefully and under torture. The SSSC is also renowned for committing outrageous contraventions and violations in respect to holding sessions and allowing defendants from defending themselves. A group called: Friends of Detainees' Families recently published some of these violations:

First: The Court has recently announced incorrect dates for court sessions, a matter which affected dozens of families. This increases dramatically the strain and suffering that they already endure, particularly that many of these families travel from other provinces or far away rural areas.

Second: The SSSC often set dates for court sessions that coincided with public holidays, despite the protestations of lawyers.

Third: The SSSC refuses to respond or answer queries from the detainees' families regarding court dates, charges against the detainees or any other that concern the trials of their relatives.

Fourth: The SSSC requests that families do not appoint lawyers to defend their detained relatives, under the justification that it will do so through the Lawyers' Union. However, the result is that trials are postponed for several months due to the absence of the appointed lawyers (without whom the session cannot be convened). The Court also refuses to pass on the names of the appointed lawyers to the families, so that they could follow up the matter with them and probably remind them of the court session dates.

Besides the sentences passed separately in Law 49, many other cases affected Islamists and civil and Kurdish activists. The SSSC in Damascus

passed a 3 year prison sentences against Arif Ismail on the 4th of December 2005, after finding him guilty of belonging to the Salafi trend.

On the 12th of March 2006, the SSSC passed three year prison sentences against Ibrahim Khalil Hassani and Ihab Al-Abka', and sent Mo'awiya Ahmed Hajjo to prison for 6 years, all because of their Islamic tendencies. Meanwhile, Hasan Abboud was sentenced to ten years imprisonment on the charge of being a member of Islamic organisation. On the 27th of March 2006, the SSSC passed a ten year prison sentence against Mohammed Osama Kash from Idlib (Student at Al-Fath Institute, arrested in August 2003), Abdulrahmna Al-Shareef (Islamic Studies student, arrested in early 2004) and Hussein Rajab Al-Abboud feom Deirizzour).

On the 2nd of April, Riyadh Hmoud Darrar, civil society activist and Islamic researcher from Deirizzour was sentences to 5 years imprisonment, on charges of dispersing false news, inciting racist tendencies and being a member of a secret organisation, all because he had spoken at the obituary meeting for Sheikh Mohammed Ma'shouq Al-Khaznawi. On the 19th of March 2006, Ahmed Haj Omar was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment on charges of attempting to change the essence of society and weaken national morals.

The SSSC sentenced Kurdish citizens Abdulkareem Allu, Mohammed Nu'man and Mustafa Khalil, to 2 years imprisonment on the 28th of August, on charges of belonging to the Kurdish Workers Party and attempting to distort relations with a friendly country. In early September, the Court sentenced Abdulrahman Allu and Marwan Sheikh Dawood to 5 years imprisonment, later reduced to two and a half years, on charges of being members of a secret organisation and separating Syrian lands and adding them to the territory of a foreign country. Engineering student Ali Shaffan was sentenced to three years, later reduced to two and a half years on charges of weakening national morals and inciting sectarian tendencies. On the 25th of September, the SSSC found Hamoud Ali Mohammed (50 years old), member of the political committee of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (YEKETI), Hashim Ameen and Shahin Mohammed Hussein, found them all guilty of being members of a secret organisation which aims to appropriate Syrian territories and hand them to a foreign country's lands. It passed sentences of 5 years imprisonment, and later reduced them to two.

In its session dated 4th of December, the SSSC passed the sentence of three years imprisonment against the Kurd, Walat Isa on charges of being a member of the Kurdish Workers Party and of appropriating Syrian lands and handing them to a foreign country as well as insulting a friendly country. In late January, the SSC sent Arif Haider to prison for two and a half years for being a member of a secret banned organization as well as for attempting to split Syrian territories and annexing them to a foreign country. In February, Ahmed Alioko was sentenced to two and a half years in prison on charges of being a member of the Kurdish Workers Party.

On the 12th of February, the SSSC sentenced Jawad Atak, an Iranian Kurd, to seven and a half years imprisonment, and Najad Ahmed, an Iraqi Kurd to three years imprisonment. Jwan Shamsiddin, a Syrian Kurd was also sentenced to two and a half years imprisonment. On the 12th of March, the SSSC sentenced Salah ibn Ibraheem to two and a half years imprisonment on charges of being a member of an unlicensed organisation which aims to appropriate Syrian territories and annex them to a foreign country.

On the 19th of March, the SSSC passed sentences ranging from 6 months to 7 years against 6 Syrian Kurds. It sent Ali Lakhati Abdu, Mohammed Khalil Allu and Walat Yunis, to prison for two and a half years after finding them guilty of being members of a 'secret organisation', which referred to the Democratic Union Party. It also sent Adaq Allu and Luqman Uthman to prison for seven years and Ali Muhiy for six months, on charges of attempting to split Syrian territories and annex them to a foreign country.

On the 26th of March, a group of Kurdish citizens were presented to the SSSC, which in turn sentenced Muhiddin Ali Atu to 15 years imprisonment due to re-offending, later reduced to seven and a half years, and Ismat Ibrahim to 5 years, later reduced to two and a half years. On the 9th of April, the SSSC sent Ali Karman, a taxi driver from Aleppo, to prison for two and a half years on charges of defaming the President. On the very same day, the court sent Samir Misto, member of the banned Kurdish Democratic Union Party, to prison for two and a half years on charges of being a member of a 'secret organisation which aims to appropriate Syrian lands and hand them to a foreign country.'

6.2- Cases still being considered by the SSSC

Saeed Ghareeb, a government employee (55 years old from Al-Sweida) currently stands trial before the SSSC on charges of cursing and swearing

at public authorities, having spent more than 2 years in detention. Also, Jihad Rafi' Shamma (30 years old) from Douma in Rural Damascus, his fiancé's father, Jameel Ahmed Summaq, Muhannad Muhsin and Mustafa Ka'ka, all held at Sednaya Military Prison, are also currently standing trial before the SSSC due to their Islamist tendencies. Dr. Mahmoud Tarmanini, a lawyer who lectured at a number of Iraqi universities and his brother Mustafa Tarmanini stood before the court on the 16th of October 2005.

There are 11 detainees who currently stand trial on charges of being members of a variety of Islamic trends, all of whom are from the village of Al-Otaiba in Rural Damascus; Abdulmu'ti Abdulhalim Kailani, Mohammed Ahmed Kailani, Ziyad Kailani, Abdullah Kailani, Khalid Abdul'al, Samer Abul Khair, Na'eem Marwa, Mohammed Izziddin, Mohammed Harraniya, Ahmed Harraniya and Khalid Hamami. Also standing trial before the SSSC are Mahmoud Al-Khateeb, Mohammed Al-Khateeb and Abdulmajid Keirawan (deaf), who were detained more than two years ago upon their return from Iraq and stand charged of being members of 'the suspicious right', which refers to the Iraqi wing of the Ba'th party. Milad Musa Qaddah was presented to court on unknown charges, whilst the trials of five youths detained since the 30th of November 2004 by the Air Force Intelligence, are ongoing as they are kept at Sednaya prison. They are: Yehia Qa'ood (28 years old, Palestinian), Majd Dahman (23 years old, Palestinian), Diya' Al-Hindi (21 years old, Palestinian), Mohammed Sha'ban (21 years old, Palestinian) and Mohammed Kheir Yaser Beitar (21 years old). Ten others are also standing trial before the same court on charges of forming a Jihadi group, they are: Mahmoud Arab, Ahmed Hussein Ali, Mus'ab Hussein Ali, Mahmoud ibn Mohammed Al-Shafi'i, Habeel Abdul Ghani Al-Hamad, Mohammed Tawfiq ibn Ahmed Murad, Mohammed ibn Jum'a Khalil, Osama ibn Mahmoud Al-Shafi'i, Ismail ibn Mohammed Mustafa, Omar ibn Shareef Dawood and Abdulqader ibn Sulaiman Murad.

Abdulrazzaq Adnan Hussein (Born in 1961, Al-Haffa, Latakia) also stands trial before the SSSC, while the trial of Nazar Al-Rastanawi, who was abducted from the street in Hama by the Military Intelligence in April 2005. Charges against him include 'dispersing false news which is likely to weaken the nation's morals and forming a secret organisation'. Al-Rastanawi is a human rights activist and a member of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in Syria. The trials of Abdulrahman Al-Shareef and Osama Kash (detained in August 2003) also continue, as they stand charges of having Islamist tendencies. Mohammed Hussein Hamada (34 years old, Al-Raqqa)

also continues to stand trial due to his Islamic background, along with others from Al-Raqqa province.

Also standing trial before the SSSC are Shaher and Murad Al-Zarqa, Mohammed Ghassan Al-Khateeb, Amir Bashir, Jamal Zainiya and Maher Khazmi, all of whom come from Al-Tal area, and all detained in August 2003 because of their Islamic tendencies. Authorities added new charges against activist and opposition figure Dr. Kamal Al-Labwani, during the second week of March. The investigation Judge added the charge of 'contacting a foreign country and encouraging it to initiate an aggression against Syria', to stand alongside the previous charges of 'transferring false information'. The new charge may bring with it the sentence of life imprisonment with hard labour, or even execution if the judge was to implement the maximum sentence. Al-Labwani stood in a session before the primary criminal court which was then adjourned until the 19th of June, 2006. Authorities transferred the case of human rights activist and media spokesman for the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in Syria, Dr. Ammar Qurabi to the SSSC. Fareed Sheikho ibn Bakr continues to stand trial alongside Sa'ad Qasim ibn Arif, both charged with belonging to a secret organisation and attempting to split Syrian territories and annex them to a foreign country.

The trial of the two students, Ayham Baddour and Shawkat Gharz continues before the Military Court in Damascus because of their participation on the vigil in front of Al-Qasr Al-Adli on the 9th of March 2006, protesting the continuation of Emergency Laws. The two were charged with inciting riots, and their trial has been adjourned so that the court could hear witness testimonies for the prosecution.

The trial of author Habib Saleh from Tartous who's been in detention for a year also continues. His solicitor contested the charge issued by the military judge. Saleh is tried on the back of his writing an article that was published on the internet, and was hence charged with 'spreading false news at a time of war which may lead to the weakening of national morals', which carries a prison sentence of 3-5 years. Former General Manager of the Electricity authority in Rural Damascus, Engineer Mustafa Shaneena, who was dismissed from his post in August 2005, presently stands trial on charges of 'spreading false news which may lead to the weakening of national morals'. Eleven other Islamists also continue to stand trial as they are held at Sednaya Military prison, amongst whom Mohammed Hussein Hamada and Hamed Khidr from Al-Raqqa province have been identified. Further, 12

Kurds have stood before the SSSC, amongst whom were 6 minors, 4 who confessed to being members of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party. The prosecution charged some of the Kurds with 'being members of a secret banned organisation and terrorism', according to article 305. Should they be found guilty, they face the prospect of being sentenced to 15-20 years imprisonment. Others are tried in accordance to article 267 and charged with 'aiding terrorist activities' which carries 5-10 years imprisonment.

The trial of lawyer Hasan Abduladheem, spokesman for the National Democratic Union in Syria and General Secretary of the Arab Democratic Socialist Union Party, continues before a military court since the 18th of December 2005, due to the publication and spreading of the 'Al-Mawqif Al-Dimoqrati' newsletter. The court continues to adjourn sentencing. Haitham Al-Maleh, lawyer and former president of Human Rights Society in Syria, also continues to stand trial before the Military Court in Damascus.

In February, author Adel Mahfoud was referred to the Preliminary Court in Tartous charged with 'disaffecting religious sensitivities' following an article he published on the internet in which he criticized 'the uncivilized actions of those who attacked the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus'. In late February, Captain Mustafa Shaweesh stood before the civil court charged with insulting and cursing high state authorities.

The Military Court in Qamishli convened on Thursday the 16th of March to try the lawyer Sabri Mirza on charges of owning the banned website 'Levant News'. It is noteworthy that the owner and director of the said website is well-known and resides outside the country. Abdulqader Hasan, charged with spreading false news, stands trial following the issuing of a statement headed: "Family of Ibrahim Haj Hasan", published by Levant News website on the 24th of January 2005. On the 25th of March 2006, authorities referred 36 civilians, most of whom are minors who took part in a celebratory demonstration on Nawrooz Festival, to the investigation Judge in Aleppo. The Judge charged them with causing damage to public properties, participating in riots, inciting sectarian tendencies and preventing security patrols through violent means, however the third Judge in Aleppo ordered the release of 18 of them on the 26th of March.

There are currently 12 Kurdish minors who stand trial before the Juvenile Criminal Court in Hasaka. They were arrested following their participation in the march that occurred in Qamishli on the 5th of June 2005, protesting the

abduction and murder of Sheikh Al-Khaznawi, for which 49 other Kurdish civilians also stand trial before the Military Court in Hasaka. The trials of 12 Kurds arrested on the 14th of September 2004 on charges of preparing Molotov Cocktail bombs, continue. Mohammed Thabit Milli also continues to stand trial for charges of being a member of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, in accordance with Law No. 49. Mustafa Fahl from Arwad Island stands trial before the State Security Court on charges of cursing and insulting the President.

Seventh: Preventing Freedoms of Expression, Public Congregation and Demonstration

7.1- Oppression as a result of exercising freedom of expression

Syrian authorities forcefully closed down Al-Atasi Forum on the 2nd of July 2005, when security forces, intervened and prevented participants in the debate from entering the Forum headquarters. In early July, Salameh Keila, member of the Monitoring Committee of the Syrian Anti-Globalisation Activists, was prevented from entering the country, within the campaign that targeted Al-Atasi Forum for Democratic Dialogue, whose General Assembly he is a member of. In the same month, 6 civilians who work at the Sugar company in Homs, were detained following a discussion they had following the airing of a show of 'Al-Ittijah Al-Mu'akis' (opposite direction) on Al-Jazeera TV, which discussed Syrian issues. In early August, a group of security officials, surrounded the meeting venue of the Revival Committees of Civil Society in Damascus, and prevented its members from entering the venue under the premise that 'the law forbids holding such meetings'.

Syrian Authorities prevented the dispersing of the second issue of 'Al-Tahuwulat' monthly newspaper which is printed in Syria, and whose editorial team is comprised of members of the Social Nationalist Syrian Party. A joint patrol of Political Security and Internal Security forces surrounded the house of George Sabra, member of the Central Secretariat of the party in Qatana. This operation continued from the morning of the 18th of August until the early hours of the next day.

On Friday the 19th of August, Security forces and the police cordoned off the meeting venue for the Board of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights in Syria in the city of Yabroud, and pursued members of the board after the cancellation of the meeting, some to as far as distant provinces. In the same month, Security Authorities in Aleppo, raided Al-Asma'i library and confiscated a number of intellectual, political and religious books. In late September, Security Forces raided the home of the lawyer Aktham No'isa, and later prevented a meeting of committees for the Defence of Democratic

and Human Rights, which was being held at the home of a member of the committees in Khan Al-Sheikh in the suburbs of Damascus.

Farooq Hajji Mustafa, a journalist specialised in Kurdish affairs, was prevented from entering Lebanese territories on orders of high security authorities because of his reports published in Lebanese papers on the 29th of October, 2005. People who attended the trial sessions of Nizar Rastanawi, member of the Arab Organisation of Human Rights, before the SSSC on the 18th of November, reported that the Judge attacked the lawyer Razan Zaitoona, in an obscene manner and dismissed her from the court room. In December, Syrian authorities prevented German institute Ghouta from organising a joint lecture between a German female researcher and Syrian researcher Dr. Abdulrazzaq Eid, on the implications of the occupation of Iraq and the German stand. The reason why this event was prevented was that Dr. Eid is classified as an opposition figure. Syrian authorities prevented the convention of a press conference by the detainees of Damascus Spring released on the 19th of January. A security patrol stopped members of the General Assembly of the Board of the Dialogue Forum who were heading for a meeting on the 24th of February, and preventing them from entering the meeting venue, without presenting any reasons or producing any documents to justify their actions. On the evening of the 18th of March, police and Political Security forces surrounded the building where the office of Mansour Al-Attasi (Communist Union Movement) is located in Homs, and prevented people from entering it. The Forces then raided the office and searched both the office and all those present at the time. This was repeated on the 27th of April. On the 22nd of April, security forces surrounded the home of engineer Rasem Al-Attasi in Homs, and prevented the convention of the fourth annual convention for the committees in support of Iraq in Syria. The forces closed down roads leading to the venue and prevented participants from entering or coming close to the house, whilst the Al-Jazeera TV crew were told to withdraw from the scene and not cover the event.

7.2- Vigils and Violence in Response

There were numerous peaceful vigils throughout this year that demanded reform, which were all met with a tough response and violence by Syrian

authorities, and in which party militias as well as security and intelligence forces were employed to suppress and disperse them.

Syrian security forces used violence in dealing with the peaceful vigil that was held on the 9th of March 2006, in front of Al-Qasr Al-Adli (Ministry of Justice) in Damascus, in which protestors demanded the eradication of Emergency Laws and allowing political rights in Syria. Authorities brought hundreds of individuals in civilian garb, armed with bats and banners who attacked the demonstrators, beating them mercilessly, while security forces and police watched on, and then arrested a number of protestors.

Syrian authorities also used force to disperse those holding a vigil commemorating the second anniversary of Qamishli events (12th of March), which claimed the lives of scores of citizens and saw hundreds others wounded and arrested. Security and police officers attacked peaceful participants in the vigil with batons and sticks, causing numerous injuries, including among others an injury to Sulaiman Shammar, member of the Political Bureau of the Arab Revolutionary Workers Party. It also arrested a number of participants including former member of Parliament Riyad Saif and Kurdish citizens including: Ismail Mohammed, Zubair Abdulrahman Heidar, As'ad Sheikho and Rajjal Tamr Mustafa. Authorities used the method of 'divide and rule' in dealing with the Arab and Kurdish contingent on this particular occasion.

The employment of force against civilians reoccurred when security forces used tear-gas bombs as well as bats to disperse a gathering of around 3000 Syrian Kurds celebrating the Nawrooz Festival in Al-Ashrafiya district in Aleppo on the 20th of March 2006. Media sources informed the SHRC that it had witnessed security forces using live ammunition to terrorise and disperse those gathered, before arresting around 100 of those participating in this celebration.

On the 10th of April 2006, around 20 judges amongst those who had been dismissed, held a vigil in front of the Presidential Palace in Damascus, demanding an audience with the President Bashar Al-Asad in order to directly inform him of the suffering they had been subjected to as a result of the Legislative Decree issued on the 4th of October 2005 and which affected 81 judges. This was the third time the judges had held a vigil, despite numerous unfulfilled pledges to grant them an audience with the President.

7.3- Press and Media Freedoms

Press and media freedoms made no progress in Syria this year. Indeed, these freedoms saw a clear decline through systemising the mono-dimension throughout all media sources, and returning to the usage of totalitarian media slogans that assert the brilliance of the President, and offering him an aura of invincibility and holiness. Attempts were intensified to block any type of media pluralism, whether within the present media sources, or in the issuing of licenses for new independent media channels, which may reflect the opposing view and opinion, which is totally and completely suppressed throughout the country. All means of media sources remain owned directly by the ruling regime, and reflect its view exclusively, whilst celebrating its achievements and attacking and criminalising its opponents and hails the principles of the Ba'th party and attacks those of any other political trend. Specialised human rights organisation continued to classify the Syrian regime as an enemy of freedoms of expression and the Internet.

Syrian Authorities continues to bar thousands of useful internet websites, as well as all Syrian opposition or human rights websites. Many citizens were arrested for merely browsing opposition websites or exchanging e-mails. Furthermore, many media personnel and journalists were harassed and some were even sent to prison, as documented above, because they had written an article or expressed an opinion that is different to that of the regime. Authorities reportedly cancelled licenses of more than 30 non-political advertising publications, in fear that something may be leaked through such channels.

SHRC also learned that Syrian authorities contacted high-ranking officials and figures of authority in other countries on numerous occasions, in order to stop the broadcasting of a TV show or interview with a political opponent, often conveying threats if such shows were allowed to be broadcast. The Authorities carried out fierce campaign attacking media channels which broadcast interviews with former Vice-President Abdulhaleem Khaddam, who broke ranks with the regime. Some channels have resorted to not announcing the names of their future guests in order to avert the harassment and contacts with high officials in their respective countries, to have these shows cancelled or stopped.

Eighth: Prohibition of Civil Rights

The Immigration and Passport Directorate of the Syrian Interior Ministry refused to issue a passport to journalist Yasin Al-Haj Saleh on the 19th of July, 2005. In August, Syrian authorities prevented Watan Qassas from travelling to be with her husband in Cyprus, and upon referring to the Political Security in Idlib province, it became clear that her entire family were also prevented from travelling abroad. They are: Hutaf, Manar, Rose, Iyad, Rana, Raya, Salah and Ithar along with their mother Rasheeda Harba, due to their relationship to dissident Firas Qassas who lives outside Syria. Syrian authorities had previously prevented (in August) lawyer Anwar Al-Bunni from travelling to Geneva to attend the sessions of the UN Commission for Human Rights.

Syrian Intelligence has been preventing the wife of Mohammed Abdulghani Majlawi, her children as well as his brothers and sisters from visiting him in Jordan for nearly 25 years. His wife Awwash and the others prevented from travelling are: Mustafa Al-Sheikh, Abdulghani Mohammed Majlawi, Ahmed Mohammed Majlawi, Zahra Mohammed Majlawi, Fatima Mohammed Majlawi, Azeeza Mohammed Majlawi, Zainab Mohammed Majlawi and Maryam Mohammed Majlawi. Former detainee, Adel Safi failed to find a job due to the fact that security authorities did not give him a security approval, which led him to work at a private Kindergarten, which he was later forced to leave, as he is forbidden to work in the education sector. Jamal Kheizaran, from Idlib province and also a former detainee, was told that he was in need of a security approval in order to convene his marriage properly. He was asked to obtain an approval from the recruitment division which in turn referred his application to Military Security, which has not responded to his application despite it reaching them many months ago.

Syrian authorities prevented Mahmoud Al-Aryan, Member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, from leaving for Cairo on the 28th of February, to attend the 3rd Arab Reform Conference. Samir Al-Nashar, activist from Al-Kawakibi Forum, was informed that he was prohibited from travelling abroad, after he had participated in an opposition conference in Washington in January 2006. Security authorities at the Lebanese borders prevented lawyer Majdoulin Hasan from leaving Syria for Lebanon on the 9th of April 2006, and informed her that her name was on a list of those prohibited from travelling abroad from the 1st of April onwards. It

is worth noting that Ms. Hasan is the defence lawyer for the detainee Habib Saleh and author Adel Mahfoud.

It is worth noting also that the list of individuals prohibited from travelling abroad contains thousands of names, including former detainees, lawyers active in defending human rights and political activists demanding democratic reforms, as well as others who have done nothing but to be relatives of opposition figures or exiled individuals.

Having relaxed their restrictions on issuing passports to those prevented from this right since 1980, in accordance with Circulation 17 for 2005, a number of Syrian embassies have returned to their old ways in barring the issuing of official documents and passports, and harassing Syrian citizens living in exile.

Security forces continue to refuse powers of attorney documents issued by exiled and deported citizens which they send to their relatives and agents inside Syria. Meanwhile, these authorities continue to re-possess the properties and possessions of those in exile or who have been sentenced in accordance with Law No. 49, as security and intelligence officers gradually and steadily take over these properties for themselves.

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