

**URGENT
ACTION**

**amnesty
international**

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International Secretariat, 10 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF, England

Amnesty International opposes by all appropriate means the imposition and infliction of death penalties and torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners or other detained or restricted persons whether or not they have used or advocated violence.

(Amnesty International Statute, Article 1(e))

EXTERNAL (for
general distribution)

HISTORICAL FILE

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Death penalty

26 June 1979

SYRIA: 14 persons sentenced to death in Aleppo

Fourteen persons were sentenced to death last week by the state security court of Aleppo, Northern Syria. Twelve were sentenced *in absentia*. Two, however, are in custody and reportedly face execution very soon.

The 14 are reported to have been involved in the massacre of some 50 military cadets on 16 June 1979 at the assembly hall of the Aleppo Artillery School. The cadets, having been summoned to an emergency meeting in the hall, were turned upon with machine-guns and hand-grenades. Unconfirmed reports say that the victims of the massacre were members of the minority 'Alawi sect, of which President Assad and many of his closest associates in government are members. Over the past three years, prominent members of the 'Alawi community have been victims of a number of assassinations. Some reports say that this latest attack may have been carried out by members of the Sunni community who are the majority religious grouping in Syria and who resent the political predominance of the 'Alawis. However, Brigadier Adnan Dabbagh, the Minister of the Interior, in confirming the assassinations and the massacre in Aleppo has officially blamed the extremist Muslim Brotherhood, although they have denied any involvement.

The state security court which tried the 14 was set up by presidential decree in 1968. Trials at the court are *in camera* and, although defence lawyers may be engaged, prior access to defence counsel in accordance with internationally-recognized norms is often reportedly denied. The verdict of the court is not subject to appeal but must be ratified by the President of the Republic, who may suspend or vacate the verdict, order a retrial or reduce the penalty.

AI concern

1. Two prisoners face imminent execution.
2. The trial of the 14 was held very quickly and was apparently of only brief duration. This and the probability that the accused were tried *in camera* and with only limited access to defence counsel may have affected the fairness of the proceedings.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telegrams/airmail letters (Syria has no "express" delivery service):

1. Urging the President to commute the death sentences on humanitarian grounds (if you write as an AI member, indicate AI's total opposition to the death penalty in all cases and without reservation);
2. In letters to the President and Minister of the Interior, express concern as outlined above in regard to the legal proceedings; request further details concerning the trial proceedings; refer to Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides for appeals against death sentences, referring to the fact that the Syrian Arab Republic has ratified this Covenant.

Appeals to:

President Hafez al-Assad,
Presidential Palace,
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

Brigadier Adnan Dabbagh,
Minister of the Interior
Ministry of the Interior, Damascus, Syria.

Please send copies of appeals to the Syrian diplomatic representative to your country and to:

Maître Sabah al Rikabi,
Bâtonnier de l'Ordre des Avocats Syriens,
rue Mayssaloune,
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

Copies of appeals from lawyers only to
the Order of Syrian Lawyers.

Maître Nizar Bakdouness,
Président de l'Association de la Défense des Droits de l'Homme, (human rights association)
rue Sadallah Jabiri,
Immeuble Kudsi,
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Please take immediate action as soon as you receive this Urgent Action appeal. Carefully read the Recommended Action.<input type="checkbox"/> Letters and telegrams should be brief and courteous. Stress that your concern for human rights is not in any way politically partisan. Refer to the relevant provisions in international law, such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights:<ul style="list-style-type: none">Article 3, "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person";Article 5, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment";Article 9, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile".<input type="checkbox"/> The name of Amnesty International can be used unless stated otherwise; although, letters written in a private or professional capacity may be more effective. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Information about the alleged connection of any person with an organization which is banned in their country is provided as background only and should not be included in appeals.<input type="checkbox"/> In Urgent Action cases, where Amnesty International has to act rapidly to prevent the possible ill-treatment of prisoners, appeals are issued when the circumstances of a person's arrest or disappearance make such treatment likely. Do not make direct accusations and, unless otherwise instructed, do not use the word "torture".<input type="checkbox"/> Send at least one telegram or express letter immediately. Other letters can be sent afterwards to the addresses listed. Copies of letters should be sent to the relevant diplomatic representatives in your country. Copies of any replies received should be sent immediately to the International Secretariat, or to your national section or Urgent Action coordinator. Thank the official who has replied, requesting that you be kept informed about the case. |
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