International Campaign in Solidarity with Middle Eastern Political Prisoners
Freedom for Middle Eastern Political Prisoners
Seeking Social Justice & Democracy

December 2017

Below are brief biographies of 17 political prisoners who represent some of the courageous fighters for social justice and democracy in the Middle East today. Most have been imprisoned by authoritarian regimes. Some have been abducted by religious extremist organizations such as ISIS and Al Qaeda.

There are at least 100,000 political prisoners in Syria, mostly in the Assad regime’s dungeons. Over 50,000 people have been detained by the Erdogan government in Turkey during the past 17 months. 60,000 political prisoners languish in Egypt’s prisons. There are 6,300 Palestinian political prisoners in Israel. Iran holds hundreds of political prisoners. Saudi Arabia continues to repress any expression of dissent. Against this background, many on the US and European left are selective in their condemnation. Worse still, some self-declared leftist and anti-war organizations openly defend the Assad regime. Some are silent about repression in Iran.

In the face of this situation, the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists, along with various socialist and labor activist organizations and individuals have initiated a new campaign in solidarity with Middle Eastern political prisoners.

The aim of this campaign is four-fold: 1. To shine a spotlight on the political prisoners who are labor, social justice, feminist, anti-racist and human rights activists opposed to war, imperialism, occupation, authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism and extremism. 2. To oppose all the global and regional imperialist powers in the Middle East: The U.S., Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and Iran. 3. To demand that both state actors and non-state actors responsible for perpetrating war crimes in the Middle East be put on trial. (We support initiatives meant to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity by enforcing universal jurisdiction, such as the cases filed in Spain, Germany, France and other EU states by local and Syrian lawyers.) 4. To show that demanding the immediate release of political prisoners in the Middle East is a crucial part of fighting the rise of authoritarianism and racism at home.

What can you do to help? If you wish to take action to express your solidarity with these prisoners, you can do the following:

1. Invite a speaker from the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists to address your union or organization or classroom
2. Choose a prisoner and write about them in your blog/website or your local newspaper
3. Join the sponsors of this campaign in organizing activities that connect labor, social justice, feminist, anti-racist, and LGBT struggles in your country to similar causes in the Middle East.

For More information contact info@allianceofmesocialists.org
www.allianceofmesocialists.org

For a partial list of initial endorsers of this campaign, see the last two pages of this brochure.
Syrian Political Prisoners

Razan Zaitouneh, Samira al-Khalil, Wa’el Hamada and Nazim Hammadi – the Douma Four – are four human rights activists who were kidnapped on December 9, 2013 from the Violations Documentation Center in Douma in the Damascus countryside. The armed groups exercising de facto control over Douma at that time include the Army of Islam, which is part of the Islamic Front. Razan Zaitouneh, who is head of the Center, had defended political prisoners in Syria since 2001 and played a key role in the promotion and protection of human rights through her work as a lawyer, activist and journalist. She also co-founded the Local Coordination Committees (LCC’s). As a result of her work, she had been threatened by both the Syrian government and armed opposition groups in Douma. Samira Al-Khalil had been a long-time political activist and feminist and had been detained by the Syrian government from 1987 to 1991 for her activism. Wael Hamada was also an activist before the 2011 uprising and was an active member of the LCC and the VDC. Hammadi, a lawyer and poet, was one of the most prominent volunteer defenders of political prisoners before and after the 2011 uprising in Syria. He contributed to founding the Local Coordination Committees. Their case has been supported by Amnesty International, the Center for Women’s Equality, Human Rights Watch, Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense Association, and many other groups. For more information, see: https://www.lrwc.org/syria-ngos-renew-call-for-release-of-douma-4-human-rights-activists-missing-for-three-years-joint-statement/

Jihad Asa’ad Muhammad On 10 August, 2013, Syrian security forces arrested Syrian journalist and Marxist dissident Jihad Asa’ad Muhammad near Athawra Street in central Damascus. News of his arrest was confirmed by his sister Lina, a fellow Marxist and anti-regime activist forced into hiding. Jihad had been among the few revolutionary activists who remained in the Syrian capital, a deceptively quiet bubble under the strangling iron fist of the regime, despite the ominous threat of arrest hovering over his head.

Jihad wrote about the thousands of ordinary, working class Syrians who are languishing in Assad’s prisons. These are the unsung heroes and heroines of the Syrian revolution – and of all revolutions – and Jihad struggled to bring their cases to light. He tells about Umm Haytham, one of thousands of Syrian women tirelessly searching for her detained husband and sons. He tells about revolutionary women from socially conservative and patriarchal communities who are on the frontline of the Syrian revolution. For more information on Jihad, see: https://budourhassan.wordpress.com/2013/09/27/freedom-for-jihad-and-syrias-wretched-of-the-earth/

Oday Tayem. On 29 August 2013, Syrian security forces arrested Palestinian-Syrian activist Oday Tayem after raiding his house in Jaramana, a regime-controlled suburb southeast of Damascus. In the five months following his incommunicado detention, attempts by Oday’s family members and friends to know the specific security branch where he is being held have failed.. Born on 12 May 1993 south of the Syrian capital in al-Yarmouk Refugee Camp, Oday is the eldest of three brothers. His father is a refugee from the ethnically-cleansed village of al-Shajara, near Tiberias, and his mother’s family was displaced from Kafr Kanna, a town near Nazareth, in the 1948 nakba. At seven years old, Oday participated in protests in Syria in support of the Second Palestinian Intifada in 2000. Like an entire younger generation of Syrian Palestinians, Oday did not give up the struggle and left his studies in Lebanon in order to participate in the “Syrian Intifada” of 2011. The Action Group for Palestinians in Syria, a London-based monitoring organization founded in 2012, has documented the names of 756 Palestinians currently being detained and nearly 300 more missing. (Budourhassan.wordpress.com/2014/01/31/oday-tayem-son-of-the-two-intifadas/)
Turkish Political Prisoners

Selahattin Demirtas, co-leader of the social democratic People’s Democratic Party (HDP) and a former presidential candidate whose party received 13% of the votes cast in 2015 parliamentary elections, has been in detention since November 2016. Demirtas, a member of the persecuted Kurdish national minority, an attorney, human-rights activist and politician, is currently being tried in absentia. He faces 142 years in prison for his involvement in peace negotiations between the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Turkish government. The Erdogan government has charged him with “founding a terrorist organization and spreading terrorist propaganda.”

Figen Yuksekdag, co-leader of the social democratic People’s Democratic Party (HDP) has also been in detention since November 2016 and is being charged with “distributing terrorist propaganda.” Ms. Yuksekdag’s, who is Kurdish, has been a labor activist and a women’s rights activist since she left her rural village at age 18. She was also the editor of The Socialist Woman magazine and co-founded the Socialist Party of the Oppressed in 2010 which then merged with the HDP in 2014.

Ahmet Sik, is a trade unionist, an investigative journalist and the author of several books which have been critical of both President Erdogan’s ruling A.K. Party and his former ally, now turned opponent, Fethullah Gulen. Sik has been in detention since December 2016 on charges of “terrorist propaganda.” Sik who received the 2014 UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize, said the following at the first session of his trial in July 2017: “I am practicing journalism by depending on the power of the truth.”

Egyptian Political Prisoners

Mahienour el-Massry is a lawyer, feminist and political activist. She was an active participant and leader in the movement that became known as the Egyptian revolution in 2011. She is currently imprisoned with co-defendant, Moatasem Medhat, and awaiting a judge’s verdict on charges of organizing a protest to criticize the actions of the military government and “insulting the president.” In 2014, she was sentenced to prison for demonstrating without a permit and remained in prison for two years during which time she received the Ludovic-Trarieux International Human Rights Award. According to Al-Jadaliya: “There was not a single struggle that was off limits for Mahienour: human rights, students rights, women’s rights, labor rights, anti-police brutality, housing for the poor, heritage preservation, climate change, street children’s right and the rights of Syrian refugees.” Mahienour el-Massry and Moatasem Medhat were AQUITTED on appeal by an Egyptian court on January 14, 2018.

Alaa Abd El-Fattah, is a blogger, software developer and political activist from a family of human rights activists and dissident intellectuals. Since 2014, he has been serving a five-year sentence for violating the military government’s anti-protest law and demonstrating against military trials for civilians in 2013. Fattah whose blog, Manala won the Special Reporters Without Borders Award in 2005, was one of the prominent activists of the revolutionary movement in 2011. He has opposed the military regime under Mubarak, the government of the Muslim Brotherhood and the military regime under General El-Sissi.
Palestinian Political Prisoners

Marwarn Barghouti, has been a highly respected political leader since the first Palestinian Intifada or uprising against Israeli occupation in 1987. He has advocated “peaceful coexistence between the equal and independent countries of Israel and Palestine based on full withdrawal from Palestinian territories occupied in 1967” He has also advocated the right to resistance inside the occupied Palestinian territories. After attempting to assassinate him in 2001, the Israeli state arrested him in 2002 and has since then imprisoned him for life on charges of “murder and membership in a terrorist organization.” In April 2017, Barghouti organized a hunger strike of over 1000 Palestinian political prisoners inside Israeli jails to oppose torture, inhumane and degrading treatment.

Khalida Jarrar is a women’s rights activist, human rights lawyer and Palestinian parliament member who has played a major role in Palestine’s successful entry into the International Criminal Court to pursue Israel for its war crimes against Palestinians. She was placed under administrative detention in April 2015 and subsequently received a 15-month prison sentence for “inciting terror.” Although released in June 2016, she was once again detained in July 2017 by the Israeli security apparatus for allegedly violating national security. In 2015, an editorial of the Israeli daily Haaretz called her trial, “a Kafkaesque perversion of military law,” determined that the charges against her were “hollow and ridiculous” and called for her release.

Shireen Issawi is a human rights lawyer and prominent advocate for Palestinian prisoner rights from occupied East Jerusalem who has participated in monitoring, documenting and advocacy on human rights violations committed by Israeli authorities against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons. Ms Issawi was arrested by Israeli authorities on 6 March 2014 and has since been held continuously in pre-trial Israeli detention.
Iranian Political Prisoners

Reza Shahabi, who recently ended a 50-day hunger strike at the Rajai Shahr prison in Tehran, is a member of the executive board of the Tehran Bus Workers’ Syndicate. Shahabi has been in and out of prison since 2010 when he was convicted of “sedition” for participating in labor strikes and organizing workers. He has endured 19 months of solitary confinement and 4 hunger strikes. Has recently had two strokes but has been denied medical treatment by the Iranian government. In addition to his deep dedication to workers’ rights, he is a strong advocate of women’s equality. He has strongly criticized the anti-labor policies of both former president Ahmadinejad and current president Rouhani. Shahabi has openly expressed his opposition to Iran’s military interventions in the region. In a letter from prison, on the occasion of International Workers’ Day in 2013, he stated: “While we condemn the warmongering and adventurist policies of sections of the Iranian government, we demand the lifting of the economic sanctions which directly aim at working-class families and toilers, and we strongly condemn any talk or thought of a military attack which will be a deadly curse…”

Narges Mohammadi, B.A. in applied physics, is a journalist, women’s rights and human rights activist, and deputy director of the Center for the Defenders of Human Rights in Iran, founded by Nobel Peace Laureate, Shirin Ebadi. In 2009, after mass protests to oppose the fraudulent election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, she was arrested on charges of “assembly and collusion against national security,” and sentenced to 11 years in prison. By 2013, after developing severe health problems, she was released after posting bail. In 2015, she was rearrested on charges of sedition and for starting a campaign against the death penalty. Her opposition to the execution of innocent Sunni political prisoners was used by the courts to accuse her of “supporting ISIS.” In 2016, she received a 16-year prison sentence which she is now serving. Mohammadi who has often been barred from seeing or talking to her small children, suffers from severe health problems but continues to speak out. In Dec. 2016, after receiving the Weimar Human Rights Award, she wrote in her letter of appreciation from prison: “as a woman who is repressed,” I “would rather be a prisoner and away from family and friends, than someone who is granted formal freedom.” She emphasized that war and sanctions which target ordinary Iranians threaten human rights.

Zeynab Jalalian is a Kurdish political activist who was arrested and imprisoned in 2008 for her activities with the political wing of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party. She received a death sentence which was later commuted to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Since her arrest and imprisonment, she has suffered from systematic abuse, torture and solitary confinement for refusing to “confess” to armed actions attributed to her by the state. Due to deliberate lack of treatment by prison authorities and the state, she has become blind.
Initial Endorsers of the Campaign in Solidarity with Middle Eastern Political Prisoners
Partial List
December 2017

Omar Abbas, Syrian student, U.S.
Frieda Afary, producer of *Iranian Progressives in Translation*, U.S.
Said Afshar, Radio Hambastegi (Radio Solidarity), Sweden
Saleem al-Beik, writer from Palestine
Leila Al-Shami, writer and activist, Co-Author of *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War*
Maria Álvarez for Convergencia-La Verdad (CS-LV) Buenos Aires, Argentina
Anti-War Committees in Solidarity with the Struggles for Self Determination, U.S.
Urayz Aydin, Excluded (for political reasons for signing a peace petition) University researcher, Turkey
Joey Ayoub, founder of *Hummus For Thought* and regional editor of *Global Voices*
Alejandro Benedetti for Regrupamiento hacia El PST (rPST-Buenos Aires,Argentina)
Jairus Banaji, SOAS, University of London
Clay Claiborne, Director, *Vietnam: American Holocaust*, Linux Beach Productions, U.S.
Committee for Revolutionary Regroupment (CRIR), Mexico
Joseph Daher, Swiss-Syrian academic & activist and creator of *Syria Freedom Forever*, Europe
Alex DeJong, Co-director, International Institute for Research and Education, Holland
E la liberta, Greece
Ann Eveleth, member, Anti-War Committees in Solidarity with the Struggles for Self-Determination, Revive the Peace Movement Network, and Syria Solidarity International.
Bob French on behalf of News and Letters Committees, U.S.
Shiyam Galyon, Syrian American writer and campaigner
Razan Ghazzawi, Syrian Palestinian scholar and activist, Europe
Stanley Heller, member American Federation of Teachers (retired) and Administrator, *Promoting Enduring Peace* and Host, *The Struggle Video News*
Rohini Hensman, author of *Workers, Unions and Global Capitalism*, India
Monica Hill, Editor of *Freedom Socialist Newspaper*, on behalf of Freedom Socialist Party, U.S.
Mohammad Abd Al-Hakim Ibrahim, Researcher, Egypt
Elizabeth Juarez, Latina Feminist and Independent Activist in U.S. and member of Feminicidios en Mexico: Esta Es La Verdad Que Se Oculta (Femicide in Mexico: This is the Hidden Truth)

Yusef Khalil, Middle Eastern socialist, International Socialist Organization, U.S.

Rima Majed, Sociologist, Lebanon

Peshraw Mohammed, leading activist from Socialist Center Review in Iraqi Kurdistan & Germany

Piergiorgio Moro, labour activist - Melbourne, Australia

Yasser Munif, Syrian sociology professor, U.S.

Dorothy Naor, Israeli peace activist

Oakland Socialist, U.S.

Khury Petersen-Smith, scholar and activist, U.S.

Michael Pugliese on behalf of the Los Angeles Branch of Solidarity

Bahram Rahmani, Member of the Council of Iranian Writers in Exile, Sweden

Beesan Ramadan, Activist, Occupied Palestine

John Reimann, Former Recording Secretary, Carpenters Local 713, U.S.

Fouad Roueiha, Syrian Italian journalist, Europe

Ahmed Shawki, author of Black Liberation and Socialism and Editorial Board of Haymarket Books

Dilip Simeon, Author, historian, public intellectual, India

Erek Slater, Ten-year Veteran Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) bus driver, - Elected Shop Steward and Executive Board Member or the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), Local 241 (10, 000 active and retiree transit worker members in Chicago and 200,000 active members in US and Canada)

Tristan Sloughter, Democratic Socialists of America, San Diego

Ashley Smith, Writer for Socialist Worker (U.S.), Member of Editorial Board of International Socialist Review

Socialist Workers Party (POS), Mexico

F. Taban, Editor-in-Chief of Akhbar-e Rooz

Farooq Tariq, Spokesperson, Awami Workers Party, General secretary Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee

David Turpin Jr., International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 134., U.S.

Johannes Waardenburg, historian, Italy (Napoli)

Cliff Willmeng, Registered Nurse, Steward, United Food & Commercial Workers Local 7, UFCW Local 7 Vice President, U.S.

Siamand Zandi, Iranian author, translator and producer of The Campaign in Defense of Prisoners of Conscience, Canada