

Syrian Court Releases Rights Activist on Bail

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DAMASCUS, Syria, Aug. 16 -- A Syrian court has released on bail a human rights activist charged with tarnishing the country's image but considered by advocacy groups to be a prisoner of conscience, one of his attorneys said Monday.

Aktham Naisse, head of the Committees for the Defense of Democratic Liberties and Human Rights, was arrested in April after publishing a report on human rights in Syria and leading a campaign urging an end to 40 years of emergency law.

"It was a surprise, a positive one though. . . . The court accepted a request by the lawyers to release him on bail," one of Naisse's attorneys, Anwar Bunni, said after the court session. "He will still have to stand trial. The next session was set for October."

If convicted, Naisse, 53, could be sentenced to between three years and life in prison.

The London-based human rights group Amnesty International said his arrest was arbitrary and in violation of Syria's obligations under international law. Naisse was labeled a prisoner of conscience during an imprisonment from 1991 to 1998.