



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement by Deputy Press Secretary Tony Fratto

The United States condemns the arrest on Monday of democracy activist Riad Seif by the Syrian regime. His arrest, which follows repeated refusals by the regime to allow Mr. Seif to travel abroad for medical treatment, is an escalation of a long series of Syrian efforts to deny its citizens the internationally recognized rights of freedom of expression and association. Through acts such as this, Syrian President Assad has made clear his contempt for the most basic rights of the Syrian people.

In addition to Mr. Seif, who already suffered five years in a Syrian prison, the Syrian regime continues to hold more than four thousand political prisoners, including ten of Seif's fellow members of the Damascus Declaration National Council. We call on the Syrian regime to release immediately all political prisoners, to uphold its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and to cease its harassment of Syrian citizens who are working peacefully for human rights and basic freedoms in their country. The Syrian regime cannot expect to be treated as a respected member of the international community while it engages in such systematic repression of its own citizens.

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