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Tunisia: abuses continue despite official denial

A former prisoner and alleged torture victim whose case was cited in Amnesty International's recent report on human rights abuses in Tunisia, and two Tunisian lawyers who shared their experience as defence lawyers at a Paris press conference organized by Amnesty International to launch this report, have since been subjected to what appears to be reprisal by the Tunisian authorities.

Ziad Fakraoui, whose case was featured in the Amnesty International report, *In the Name of Security: Routine Abuses in Tunisia* (MDE 30/007/2008), was re-arrested by state security officials in civilian clothes on 25 June 2008, two days after the report's publication, and has not been seen since. The security agents who took him away told his mother that they were taking him to the Ministry of the Interior but refused to give any reason for his arrest. Although his family and lawyers sought news about his whereabouts since his arrest, they were not able to obtain any information. Lawyers learnt only today, seven days after his arrest, that he was brought before an investigating judge on 28 June and charged with belonging to a terrorist organization and incitement to terrorism. These were the same charges for which he was arrested in 2005 and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in December 2007, reduced to three years on appeal in May 2008. He was released on 24 May as having already served his sentence. The fact that no one was informed of his whereabouts meant in effect that he was held in prolonged incommunicado detention for longer than the maximum six day period allowed under Tunisian law. He is currently detained in Mornaguia prison where his lawyers and family are yet to get access to him.

In its report, Amnesty International said such practices, including unlawfully prolonged detentions, which amount to enforced disappearances and create the conditions for torture and other abuse of detainees, were common, and called on the Tunisian government to end such abuses and hold its security forces to account.

Two Tunisian lawyers and human rights defenders, Samir Dilou and Anouar Kousri, who spoke at a press conference on 23 June in Paris on Amnesty International report, were harassed by security officials when they returned to Tunis. They were held for up to two hours at Tunis airport by security officials who searched them and their luggage. Subsequently, police visited their homes and told them that they should report at a police station without providing any reasons, and they were questioned about their participation in the Amnesty International press conference by police who accused them of circulating false information and harming Tunisia's image abroad. Samir Dilou was threatened with prosecution if he continues such activities.

Amnesty International is urging the Tunisian government to end the practice of illegal detention in Tunisia and harassment of Samir Dilou, Anouar Kousri and other human rights defenders, and to take concrete measures to address the human rights violations described in its recent report and other reports by Tunisian human rights organizations.