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Tunisia: Appeal trial for political prisoner convicted after media statements

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about the detention of Sadok Chourou, a political prisoner who will appear before the Tunis Court of Appeal tomorrow. He is appealing a verdict handed down by the Tunis Court of First Instance sentencing him to one year's imprisonment on 13 December 2008 for "maintaining a banned organization", a charge related to his connection with the banned Islamist movement Ennahda.

Amnesty International fears that he may be a prisoner of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression after his release from prison in November 2008 following 18 years' detention. **If this is the case, he should be released immediately and unconditionally.** Sadok Chourou gave interviews to Arab media about his prison experience, as well as his views on the political situation in Tunisia, and expressed his wish that the Ennahda movement be authorized to resume its political activities.

Sadok Chourou had been sentenced to life imprisonment by a military court in 1992 but was conditionally released on 5 November 2008, along with 43 others, on the occasion of the 21st anniversary of President Ben Ali's accession to power. He was re-arrested at his home one month later, on 3 December 2008.

Background

Sadok Chourou, a professor at the Faculty of Science of Tunis University and former head of Ennahda, was sentenced to life imprisonment by the military court in Bouchoucha, in Tunis, on 28 August 1992 in connection with an alleged "plot" by Ennahda to overthrow the Tunisian government. Amnesty International observed the trial at the time and found it to be grossly unfair. Sadok Chourou was one of several defendants who were reportedly tortured in pre-trial detention. The statements obtained under torture were used as the main evidence against them in court, while the torture allegations were not investigated.

Since the late 1980s, the Tunisian authorities have tried without success to produce evidence that Ennahda, which was denied legal authorization in June 1989, was involved in attempts to overthrow the government by force. The leadership of Ennahda has repeatedly denied this accusation and condemned the use of violence.