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Tunisia: Releases of scores of political prisoners is positive step

Amnesty International welcomes the release on 3 November of scores of political prisoners in Tunisia but the organization is concerned that their release is conditional. Most had been imprisoned for over a decade because they were members or sympathizers of the unauthorized Islamist movement *Ennahda*.

Several of them are reportedly still detained in police centres, apparently pending clarification of additional charges against them, or the settlement of fines, while others have already been released and have returned to their families.

As the releases were conditional, those released could be arrested and imprisoned again at any time to serve the remainder of their sentence, upon simple order by the Ministry of the Interior and without any judicial process. Amnesty International is concerned that, in view of their conditional release, they may be denied certain rights, including the right to freedom of expression and freedom of movement.

Most of those released are apparently members and sympathizers of the unauthorized Islamist movement *Ennahda*. They were arrested, tortured and imprisoned after grossly unfair trials in the early 1990s. According to early reports, those released were predominantly prisoners whose prison terms would have come to an end in a matter of months.

Several hundreds of political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, continue to be detained in Tunisia. Many have been imprisoned for over a decade and suffer from ill health, others have been detained in solitary confinement, sometimes for years.

Amnesty International urges the Tunisian authorities to release all prisoners of conscience unconditionally and without further delay and to put an end to unfair trials. The organization calls on the government to abide by its obligations under Tunisian laws and international human rights standards. In particular, all provisions that permit prison sentences for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression must be removed and existing safeguards for fair trials must be respected.