

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### Libya: Concerns for health of prisoners of conscience

Amnesty International is raising its concerns with the Libyan authorities about the health of some 86 men held in Abu Salim Prison, who undertook a hunger strike this month. All the men, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience, are believed to be members of the Libyan Islamic Group, also known as the Muslim Brothers. Amnesty International is seeking assurances that the men are given full access to medical care in order to ensure that they fully recover from the effects of their hunger strike.

Amnesty International recalls the Libyan authorities' obligation to provide quality medical care to people in custody. Article 9 of the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners states that: "Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation."

According to Amnesty International's information, the hunger strike began on 7 October 2004 and lasted for some seven days. At least eight of the hunger strikers were reportedly taken to a hospital in Tripoli but there are no details regarding any medical attention afforded to the others.

Prisoners reportedly undertook the hunger strike in protest at their continued detention and at the lengthy delays of the judicial authorities to reach a final verdict in their appeal case. In addition to this, the hunger strikers called for the release of all prisoners of conscience and for the abolition of certain laws which include provisions that violate human rights, notably Law 71 of 1972 banning political parties. They also called for the abolition of the People's Court, an exceptional court known to try political cases. These calls echo those made by Amnesty International, including in its report *Libya: Time to make human rights a reality*, published in April 2004.

The strike also appears to be a response to the feeling by the prisoners that previous concerns they have raised have not been considered by the authorities. After their last court hearing on 7 April 2004, the accused apparently refused to leave the courtroom. They reportedly presented a document of concerns to the judge and asked to speak to a representative of the Ministry of Public Security. The accused eventually agreed to leave the courtroom and return to their cells, apparently after receiving assurances from an official that their concerns would be considered. Shortly after, some of the men undertook a three-day hunger strike. Prisoners reportedly allege that the authorities have not responded to their initial set of concerns.

The men were sentenced at first instance on 16 February 2002; two of the accused were sentenced to death and the rest to prison terms varying between 10 years and life imprisonment. Their case is currently on appeal before the People's Court of Appeal. Since its opening in the summer of 2002, it has been repeatedly adjourned, with hearings taking place approximately every three months and

reportedly lasting just a few minutes. The next hearing is scheduled to take place in late November 2004.