

PUBLIC

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UA 18/08 Forcible return/ fear of torture or ill-treatment

**SYRIA/TUNISIA Safouan Ben Abdelwahed Ammouri (m), aged 25, Tunisian national**

Tunisian national Safouan Ammouri is at imminent risk of being forcibly returned to Tunisia where it is feared that he would face arbitrary arrest, torture and other ill-treatment. He is currently being held in a detention facility in the Syrian capital, Damascus, where individuals are held prior to deportation. Two other Tunisians who were arrested with him in July 2007 were returned to Tunisia on 15 January and their families have received no news of them since.

On 4 May 2004, Safouan Ammouri reportedly left Tunisia to study in Syria and to flee harassment by the Tunisian authorities. On several occasions, he was taken to the police station and asked to sign a commitment to shave off his beard. Growing a beard is perceived in Tunisia as an act of allegiance to radical Islam. After his departure from Tunisia, Tunisian security officers reportedly went to his mother's house several times and questioned her about his whereabouts and what he was studying in Syria.

Two weeks after Safouan Ammouri's arrival in Syria, three young men from his neighbourhood in Tunisia's capital, Tunis, were arrested by Tunisian police and accused of possessing CDs containing books and films they considered *Jihadist*. During the interrogation, one of them reportedly said that he was given the CDs by Safouan Ammouri. On these grounds, on 11 December 2005, Safouan and the three men were sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for "calling for membership of an organization with terrorist links" and for "publicizing a terrorist organization, its members and activities." The sentence against Safouan Ammouri, which was handed down in his absence, still stands. The three men were released after serving two and a half years.

In 2006-2007 Safouan Ammouri was studying in Syria at the Al-Fateh Al-Islami Institute, a centre for Islamic studies, in Damascus. On 31 July 2007, he was arrested in Damascus along with two other Tunisians. During interrogation Syrian police accused him of membership in a group seeking to overthrow the Tunisian government. He was detained and interrogated at various police stations around Syria and was reportedly tortured.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Over the years, Amnesty International has received numerous reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the Tunisian security forces, including agents of the State Security Department at the Ministry of the Interior in the capital, Tunis. In virtually all cases, allegations of torture are not investigated and the perpetrators are not brought to justice.

Between January and March 2007, nine Tunisians were forcibly returned to Tunisia from Egypt. All were detained incommunicado for several days and interrogated before being released. Two of them, Ayman Hkiri and Adam Boukadida, are being tried under the 2003 anti-terrorism law. Several of them alleged that they were tortured or ill-treated in detention. In June 2007, Hussein Tarkhani was forcibly returned to Tunisia from France and was arrested and detained incommunicado upon his arrival for a period of nine days which exceeds the six-day limit of garde-a-vue (pre-arraignment police custody) allowed under Tunisian law. He alleged that he was tortured during his detention at the Ministry of the Interior.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, French, English or your own language:**

- urging the Syrian authorities not to deport Safouan Ammouri to Tunisia since he would be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment;

- reminding the authorities that as parties to the Convention Against Torture and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights they are under an obligation not to deport anyone to a country where they would be at risk of torture;
- calling for assurances that he is being humanely treated in detention, and not further tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the authorities to grant him immediate access to his relatives, lawyer and any medical treatment he may require.

**APPEALS TO:**President

His Excellency Bashar al-Assad,  
Presidential Palace,  
Abu Rummaneh, al-Rashid Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: + 963 11 332 3410**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of the Interior

His Excellency Major General Bassam Abdel Magid,  
Ministry of Interior,  
'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic

**Fax: + 963 11 2223428**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:** diplomatic representatives of Syria accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 February 2008.