

6 March 1998

Further information on UA 59/98 (MDE 30/05/98, 24 February 1998) and follow-up (MDE 30/06/98, 26 February 1998) - Fear of Torture/Ill-treatment/ Fear of further possible arrests and new concern: Prisoners of conscience

TUNISIA Qais OUISLATI
 Nouredine BENTICHA
 Ali JALLOULI
 Lotfi HAMMAMI
 Taha SASSI
 Sabri BEN BELGACEM (released)
 Jalal BOURAOUI
 Jalloul OUISLATI
 Chedli HAMMAMI

<u>New Names:</u>	Rachid TRABELSI	(arrested 26 February 1998)
	Bourhan GASMI	(arrested around 1 March 1998)
	Miled BELANES	(arrested 3 March 1998)
	Haikal MANNAI	(Student, arrested 22 February 1998)
	Ridha OUISLATI	(Student, date of arrest not known)
	Habib HARZI	(Student, date of arrest not known)

Amid growing fears of more arrests in the coming days Amnesty International has received additional information concerning details of other arrests in connection with the February student strikes (see new names). Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience.

A number of the above-named have now been brought before the examining magistrate: Qais Ouislati and Nouredine Benticha on 3 March 1998, Ali Jallouli, Lotfi Hammami and Taha Sassi on 4 March and Jalal Bouraoui, Chedli Hammami, Haikal Mannai, Ridha Ouislati and Habib Harzi on 5 March.

Charges against them are understood to include setting up a criminal gang, holding unauthorized meetings, distributing leaflets and spreading false information against public order. They have since been transferred to the 9 Avril Prison in Tunis. The majority had reportedly been ill-treated during the period of their secret detention.

The arrest date for Qais Ouislati on 18 February was reportedly recorded as 21 February to hide the fact that he was held incommunicado beyond the maximum 10-day period permitted by Tunisian law.

Those who remain in secret detention are expected to be brought before the examining magistrate in the coming days. They include:

- Rachid Trabelsi, a fourth year law student.
- Bourhan Gasmi, arrested on several previous occasions and, in October 1996, sentenced to two years' imprisonment on charges of links with the unauthorized *Partie Communiste des Ouvriers Tunisiens*, (PCOT), Tunisian Workers' Communist Party. On 28 February his sister was also arrested by security forces and interrogated for several hours before being released and the home of their parents searched.

- Miled Belanes, a teacher, married with a small child. After his arrest, the security forces occupied his apartment, forcing his pregnant wife to stay with neighbours. His brother, Abdelmoumem Belanes, is currently also a prisoner of conscience.

Security forces have also illegally searched the homes of the families of other detainees and former prisoners of conscience.

Sabri ben Belgacem was released from detention around 25 February, while Nejoua Rezgui, a former prisoner of conscience from November 1994 to March 1997 and the mother of a three-month-old baby, arrested on 3 March was released one or two days later.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, Arabic, English or in your own language:

- expressing concern that some of those arrested are reported to have been ill-treated during their secret detention and calling for the allegations to be promptly, independently and impartially investigated;
- expressing concern at the arrest of Rachid Trabelsi, Bourhan Gasmi, Miled Belanes, Haikal Mannai, Ridha Ouisslati and Habib Harzi, and urging that all those held in secret detention be allowed immediate access to their families, lawyers and medical care if necessary;
- urging that all the above-mentioned detainees, considered to be prisoners of conscience, be immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Justice

M. Abdallah Kallel
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis
Tunisia

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisia

Faxes: + 216 1 568 106

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

2) Minister of the Interior

M. Ali Chaouch
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
1001 Tunis
Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Tunis, Tunisia

Faxes: + 216 1 346 624

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Tunisian Human Rights League

Me Taoufik Bouderbala, Président
Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH
7 Rue Pierre Curie
Tunis
Tunisia

Tel/faxes: + 216 1 336 338

and to diplomatic representatives of TUNISIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 April 1998.