

PUBLIC

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UA 174/98

Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Prisoners of

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TUNISIA **Samia Ferhati (f), student**
Najah Zitouni (f), student
Najoua Rezgui (f), student

Samia Ferhati, Najah Zitouni and Najoua Rezgui are believed to be in *garde à vue* (incommunicado detention) subsequent to their recent arrests and are feared to be at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Samia Ferhati and Najah Zitouni were arrested on 5 June 1998 on their way to visit students detained at the *Prison civile*, Civil Prison, in Tunis. Both are members of the *Union Générale des Etudiants Tunisiens* (UGET), General Union of Tunisian Students. Najoua Rezgui was arrested in Sousse, South Tunisia, on 7 June.

Their homes were all subsequently searched by police.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The arrests of Samia Ferhati, Najah Zitouni and Najoua Rezgui are reportedly connected to a wave of arrests (see UA 59/98, MDE 30/05/98, 24 February 1998 and follow ups) which took place after students protested in Tunis and other cities in February, calling for better conditions. Najoua Rezgui was recently released from prison after serving a two year prison sentence for her involvement in a student demonstration in 1994, known as the Khairawan affair. She was one of 30 students who received sentences of up to five years imprisonment.

Periodical arrests and detention of students involved in student union activities is common in Tunisia. Over the past year thousands of government opponents and critics have been detained as prisoners of conscience for the peaceful expression of their beliefs. Torture and ill-treatment is often used against these detainees, especially in the days immediately after arrest, when they are held in secret detention without access to their families, lawyers, or to anyone else in the outside world.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest of Samia Ferhati and Najah Zitouni on 5 June 1998 and Najoua Rezgui on 7 June 1998 and seeking assurances that they will be treated humanely;
- expressing concern that they are allegedly being held in secret detention and that they may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment;
- urging that they be allowed immediate access to their families, lawyers and medical care if necessary;
- urging that they be charged with a recognizably criminal offence or immediately and unconditionally released.

APPEALS TO:

M. Abdallah Kallel
Ministre de la Justice, Ministère de la Justice
31 Boulevard Bab Benat, 1006 Tunis, Tunisie
Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisie
Faxes: + 216 1 568 106

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

M. Ali Chaouch

Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
1001 Tunis , Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 354 331

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

Faxes: + 216 1 336 338 (if voice, say: je voudrais envoyer un fax, s'il vous plaît)

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 24 July 1998.