

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE¹¹

July 2000

AI Index MDE 30/015/2000 - News Service Nr. 136

TUNISIA: Amnesty International and the FIDH still unwelcome in Tunisia.

Amnesty International is surprised and deeply disappointed that two of the organization's delegates, Donatella Rovera and Hassina Giraud, along with Patrick Baudoin, President of the Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'homme (FIDH) International Human Rights Federation, have been prevented from entering Tunisian territory.

Donatella Rovera, Hassina Giraud and Patrick Baudoin were informed that they were prohibited from entering Tunisian territory on the morning of 11 July at Tunis-Carthage airport, as they arrived from Paris and were preparing to undertake an information-gathering mission in the country. Amnesty International and the FIDH had recently received an agreement in principle from the Tunisian authorities to a resumption of their visits to Tunisia. The Tunisian authorities have refused Donatella Rovera and Patrick Baudoin access to Tunisian territory since 1994 and 1996 respectively.

This decision by the Tunisian government once more clearly illustrates the gap separating official Tunisian comments on respect for human rights and basic freedoms, and the systematic repression of the activities of the defenders of these rights, Amnesty International declared.

Although the Tunisian government has recently taken some symbolic measures, giving passports to some Tunisian human rights activists, this ban on the entry of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into Tunisia proves that the Tunisian authorities

have not changed their basic position and continue to repress activities linked to the defence and promotion of human rights, the organization said today.

Background

During the last few months Tunisia has witnessed a change in the human rights "climate". More and more people are demonstrating against government decisions, publicly criticizing the absence of freedoms and taking part in local NGO meetings. The government has also given certain prominent people back their basic rights. This represents a positive development but unfortunately does not affect the overall situation. Up to a thousand political prisoners charged with membership of the Islamist group al-Nahda (Renaissance), most of whom are prisoners of conscience, remain detained, generally in very bad conditions. Their families, as well as those of former political prisoners, are subjected to various forms of harassment and intimidation, and denied access to public services. Several associations, such as the *Conseil national pour les libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT), National Council for Liberties in Tunisia, remain banned. Authorised associations such as the *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme* (LTDH), Tunisian Human Rights League, are subjected to heavy restrictions. Several human rights defenders continue to be harassed and intimidated. Those who attempt to publicly express their discontent, like the recently formed groups of unemployed graduates, are arrested and ill-treated. The Tunisian authorities have, on several occasions, expelled and banned from their territory foreign journalists and human rights activists.

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