

PUBLIC

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EXTRA 60/98

Health concern / Prisoners of conscience

25 August 1998

TUNISIA Afef Ben Rouina (f), student
Imen Derouiche (f), student
Hinda Aaroui (f), student

There are serious health concerns for the above-named students who have been on hunger strike since 20 August 1998 in protest at their continued detention.

The three women were arrested between February and April 1998 amidst a wave of mass arrests in connection with student strikes asking for better conditions (see UA 59/98, MDE 30/05/98, 24 February 1998 and follow-ups). They have been charged, together with many others, of belonging to a criminal and terrorist gang, holding unauthorized meetings, inciting rebellion, spreading false information aiming to disturb public order, defamation against the authorities and distributing leaflets. Amnesty International considers all the detainees to be prisoners of conscience.

Most of those arrested, including the above-named, have reportedly been ill-treated during periods of incommunicado detention. On 16 June it was reported that Imen Derouiche was so badly beaten she required hospitalization.

Immediately following this the above-named women went on a hunger strike lasting three days during which they were denied liquids and told that family visits would not be allowed should they continued.

The women, originally all detained at Mannouba Women's Prison, have subsequently been separated from one another. Afef Ben Rouina has been transferred to Grombalia prison and Imen Derouiche to Beja prison. Hinda Aaroui's place of detention, however, is not known. All had access to a lawyer before they were transferred but it is not now known if this is still the case.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Periodical arrests of students involved in student union activities is common in Tunisia, where detention of prisoners of conscience is widespread. 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 detainees are held in secret detention without access to their families, lawyers, or to anyone else in the outside world.

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

- expressing concern regarding the health of Afef Ben Rouina, Imen Derouiche and Hinda Aaroui who have been on hunger strike since 20 August 1998 in protest at their continued detention and seeking assurances that they be given all necessary medical care;
- urging that the women, considered to be prisoners of conscience, be immediately and unconditionally released, quoting Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".

APPEALS TO:

If voice answers please say: "je voudrais envoyer un fax, s'il vous plaît"

Minister of Justice

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

Minister of the Interior

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

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 23 September 1998.

**"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and
security of person"**

Article 3, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Visit the Amnesty International UDHR campaign website on <http://www.amnesty.excite.com>