

URGENT ACTION

TUNISIAN ACTIVISTS ARRESTED

Hamma Hammami, spokesperson for the banned Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (Parti Communiste des Ouvriers Tunisiens, PCOT), was arrested at his home on 12 January. Two people who were also in the house, lawyer Mohamed Mzem and Mounia Obaid, were arrested as well.

Hamma Hammami is reported to have been arrested by more than 20 officers from the Presidential Security. He was in his house with his 11-year-old daughter, as well as lawyer **Mohamed Mzem** and **Mounia Obaid**, who were also arrested. His daughter managed to slip away. Security officers also took Hamma Hammami's computer. His wife, lawyer and human rights activist Radhia Nasraoui, believes Hammami was arrested because he had spoken to several different media networks about the views of the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, regarding the ongoing protests in Tunisia, which are calling for better living conditions and an end to unemployment and corruption.

Eyewitnesses informed Radhia Nasraoui that Mounia Obaid was not arrested at first but that security officers re-entered the house to arrest her, apparently after receiving orders not to leave any witnesses. Mounia Obaid was released later but there is no news on the fate of Hamma Hammami and Mohamed Mzem.

Hamma Hammami has been previously targeted by the Tunisian authorities for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and has been arrested and reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated during detention several times in past years. In September 2009 he was physically assaulted by men believed to be plain-clothes police officers at Tunis airport upon his return from France after having criticized the then recent presidential and parliamentary elections, President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and corruption in interviews to Al Jazeera Mubasher and France 24 satellite television channels. In October, he was summoned by the criminal police but did not respond to the summons for fear of being arbitrarily arrested. He subsequently went into hiding and only recently came out of hiding. His wife and children have also been harassed by security officers.

Over the past few weeks protests have been taking place in Tunisia, following the suicide of a 26-year-old unemployed graduate on 17 December, and the government has responded in a heavy-handed manner. Throughout this period scores of people have reportedly been arrested, among them journalists, bloggers and others who have spoken out. Amnesty International fears for the safety of those who remain in detention.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, French or your own language:

- Urging the Tunisian authorities to immediately disclose the whereabouts of Hamma Hammami, and Mohamed Mzem and to allow them immediate access to their family members, lawyers of their choice, and to ensure that they are protected from all forms of torture or other ill-treatment;
- Calling on the Tunisian authorities to either charge Hamma Hammami and Mohamed Mzem with recognizable criminal offences, and try them accordingly, or to release them.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Lazhar Bououni

Ministry of Justice and Human Rights

31 Boulevard Bab Benat

1006 Tunis – La Kasbah

Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 568 106

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Ahmed Friaa

Ministry of Interior and Local

Development

Avenue Habib Bourguiba

1000 Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: +216 71 340 888

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Director General of Prisons and Re-education

Direction générale des prisons et de la rééducation

Rue 8003 – Appartement L

Espace de Tunis

Monplaisir, Tunis, Tunisia

Salutation: Dear Director

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after this date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 17 December, 26-year-old university graduate Mohamed Bouazizi committed suicide by setting fire to himself in Sidi Bouzid, in central Tunisia, after policemen confiscated his unlicensed fruit and vegetable cart, his sole source of income. His protest was picked up by trade unionists, students, human rights activists and lawyers, who took to the streets demanding jobs, better living conditions and the end of corruption.

As protests spread to other areas of Tunisia, security officers responded with excessive forces using tear gas and live bullets to disperse crowds. Tunisian authorities claim that 21 people have been killed but human rights organizations believe the figure is much higher.

Waves of arrests have taken place throughout the country during the ongoing protests as freedoms of expression and assembly are curtailed and undermined. Among those arrested are journalists, lawyers, students and bloggers. Exact figures of people still detained have not been released by the authorities who have a track record of holding people incommunicado.

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