

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 28/008/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 044
6 March 2007

Algeria: Growing fears for safety of two men held by intelligence agency

Amnesty International is calling on the Algerian government to disclose immediately the exact whereabouts and legal status of two young men, Youcef Belmouaz and Brahim Abed, who are reported to have been detained incommunicado since November 2006 in the custody of the military intelligence agency known as the Department for Information and Security (*Département du renseignement et de la sécurité*, DRS).

According to Amnesty International's information, Youcef Belmouaz, a 21-year-old veterinary student, and Brahim Abed, a 23-year-old computer science graduate, were arrested by plain-clothes security force officers in the city of Tiaret, some 350kms south-west of the capital Algiers, on 26 November and 27 November 2006 respectively.

After making enquiries about the reasons for the arrests and the whereabouts of their sons, the families were informed by the public prosecutor of Tiaret at the end of December 2006 that, according to a letter from the Ministry of Justice, the two men had been transferred to Algiers and were being held there in the custody of the DRS. The public prosecutor in Tiaret further recommended that the families contact the office of the public prosecutor at the Criminal Court of Algiers. The men's relatives say that they wrote to the office at the end of December 2006, but have yet to receive a response.

In the latest development, Youcef Belmouaz's family say that they received an anonymous phone call on 3 March 2007 claiming that Youcef Belmouaz and Brahim Abed had been transferred to a prison in Algiers. The following day the families of both men reportedly presented themselves at the office of the public prosecutor at the Criminal Court of Algiers to seek confirmation of the news, but were told that the judicial authorities could neither do this nor give them any other information about the men's whereabouts or legal status.

Amnesty International is concerned that the two men appear to have been held significantly in excess of the maximum legally permitted 12-day limit for detainees to be held without charge or access to legal counsel, and are consequently being detained arbitrarily. They have reportedly not been allowed to contact their families or to receive visits from them while in detention, despite the fact that these rights are guaranteed under the Algerian Criminal Procedure Code. Under such conditions, Amnesty International is concerned that the two men are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

In a letter sent yesterday to Algerian Justice Minister Tayeb Belaiz, Amnesty International called for Youcef Belmouaz and Brahim Abed to be immediately released or brought before a judicial authority, charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial promptly and fairly. Amnesty International also appealed for the men to be given prompt access to medical attention and legal counsel as stipulated by the Algerian Criminal Procedure Code, and for any complaint of torture or other ill-treatment to be immediately and

independently investigated.

Background

Also known as Military Security, the DRS specializes in interrogating people thought to possess information about terrorism or other matters affecting Algeria's internal security. Detainees held by the DRS are routinely held in secret places of detention, sometimes for prolonged periods in breach of Algerian law, and allowed no contact with the outside world. Many detainees have been subjected to torture or other ill-treatment while in the custody of the DRS, apparently with impunity. The Algerian authorities have failed consistently to ensure that allegations of torture or other ill-treatment of detainees are investigated and that DRS officials responsible for torturing or ill-treating detainees are held to account.

Amnesty International published some of the persistent evidence of torture and other ill-treatment by the DRS in a report entitled *Unrestrained powers - Torture by Algeria's Military Security* (AI Index: MDE 28/004/2006), issued in July 2006.