

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 30/024/2003

31 October 2003

UA 314/03 Denial of medical care

TUNISIA Lotfi Idoudi (m), aged approximately 38

Political prisoner Lotfi Idoudi is believed to be denied adequate medical treatment for a cerebral haemorrhage in hospital in the capital Tunis. His life may be in danger if the authorities do not act immediately to ensure he receives adequate medical care.

According to a lawyer who visited him on 29 October, Lotfi Idoudi reported to the prison administration of the *9 Avril* prison in Tunis on 18 October that he had a severe headache, but prison authorities denied him access to a doctor. His condition deteriorated to the point where he was hospitalized on 25 October at the Surgical-Neurology Institute in Tunis. According to a medical source contacted by his family, Lotfi Idoudi urgently needs cerebral surgery. Doctors treating Lotfi Idoudi have told his family that they are unwilling to operate on him and are calling for his transfer to a private clinic. Authorities at *9 Avril* prison are said to be refusing to approve payment for the transfer.

When he was arrested in 1991, Lotfi Idoudi was a student at the Faculty of Law in the city of Sousse and a member of the executive committee of the *Union Générale Tunisienne des Etudiants* (UGTE), Tunisian General Union of Students, a student trade union reportedly close to the banned opposition party *al-Nahda* (Renaissance). After his arrest, Lotfi Idoudi was reportedly severely tortured by officers of the security forces, and is still affected by injuries sustained during torture. After several unfair trials, Lotfi Idoudi was sentenced to a total of 17 years' imprisonment on charges including belonging to an unauthorized association.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Tunisia are reportedly denied medical care on an arbitrary and discriminatory basis. Doctors who were themselves recently released from prison have reported that virtually all long-term prisoners are ill as a consequence of bad prison conditions, sometimes aggravated by torture, poor hygiene and lack of medical care. In some cases, the denial of medical care is believed to have been one of the factors leading to the development of serious illnesses and even deaths in custody. For years, Tunisian human rights organizations have campaigned for the prison conditions to be improved and for those suspected of inflicting torture and ill-treatment and torture to be brought to justice. Several human rights defenders have paid a heavy price, including assaults by the security forces and other forms of intimidation, for having raised this issue (see report issued in June 2003 *Tunisia: the cycle of injustice*, AI Index: MDE 30/001/2003).

So far, the right for all prisoners to an environment that respects their human dignity is far from being guaranteed. Additional discriminatory and arbitrary measures such as prolonged solitary confinement continue to worsen the conditions of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. For years, a policy of discrimination has been tolerated, even condoned, at the highest level in the state. Prisoners have faced obstructions when they have sought redress. Several hundred political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience, remain in prison in Tunisia.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to ensure that Lotfi Idoudi is given adequate medical care immediately;
- calling on the authorities to investigate the allegations that Lotfi Idoudi was not granted access to a doctor by the authorities at the *9 avril* prison authorities when he reported his pain;

- urging the authorities to implement the recommendations made by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, including ensuring that all prisoners, without discrimination, are granted their rights as defined by law and international standards and that they are given every opportunity to seek redress if their rights have been violated;
- reminding the authorities that they have a duty to retry all prisoners who have received unfair trials, or release them, and to release all prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

President / Président de la République

Président Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Palais Présidentiel
Tunis, Tunisie

Telegram: President de la République, Tunis, Tunisie

Fax: + 216 71 744 721

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

Minister of Justice and Human Rights / Ministre de la Justice et de Droits de l'Homme

M. Bechir Tekkari
Ministère de la Justice et de Droits de l'Homme
31 Av. Bab Benat
1006 Tunis, La Kasbah, Tunisie

Telegram: Ministre de la Justice, Tunis, Tunisie

Fax: + 216 71 568 106

E-mail: mju@ministeres.tn

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Official human rights body, reporting to the President

Comité supérieur des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales
Zakaria Ben Mustapha (Président)
85 avenue de la Liberté - 1002 Tunis-Belvédère – Tunisie

Fax: + 216 71 796 593 / 784038

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 12 December 2003.