

UA 28/02

Fear of t

TUNISIAHamma Hammami (m)

Abdeljabbar Madouri (m)

Samir Taamallah (m)

Ammar Amroussia (m)

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The four men named above, who have been on the run for four years because of their membership of an outlawed political party, have now announced that they intend to come out of hiding. Political opponents or alleged political opponents of the Tunisian government are routinely arrested and tortured, and the authorities may attempt to force these men to confess to illegal activities carried out during their time on the run. If they are arrested, Amnesty International will consider them prisoners of conscience.

Hamma Hammami, Abdeljabbar Madouri and Samir Taamallah went into hiding in February 1998. They were sentenced *in absentia* to nine years and three months' imprisonment in July 1999, on charges of "belonging to an unauthorised organisation", the *Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens* (PCOT), Tunisian Workers' Communist Party. Amnesty International expressed serious concern at the lack of respect for the rights of the defence shown during the trial, and called for the men's sentences to be annulled.

Among the 18 people sentenced with them were Hamma Hammami's wife, the prominent human rights lawyer Radhia Nasraoui, who received a suspended sentence (see UA 194/99, MDE 30/36/99, 3 August 1999, and follow up, MDE 30/33/99, 8 September 1999). Amnesty International called for her sentence to be annulled, and for the 17 defendants who were imprisoned to be released.

On 15 January 2002, lawyers representing Hamma Hammami, Abdeljabbar Madouri and Samir Taamallah successfully petitioned the First Instance Tribunal in Tunis, which sentenced the men, to retry them: under Tunisian law those who have been tried and sentenced *in absentia* have the right to retrial. Their case will be heard on 2 February, and they are expected to come out of hiding to attend the hearing.

Ammar Amroussia is expected to emerge from hiding at the same time. He had been sentenced *in absentia* to three years and nine months' imprisonment in December 1992, after a trial of 11 alleged PCOT supporters. In January 1997 he petitioned the court to retry his case. In November 1997 he was resentenced to two years and four months' imprisonment, and he has been in hiding ever since.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Repression of dissent is widespread in Tunisia. The authorities' opponents, real or perceived, face arrest, torture, unfair trial and imprisonment as prisoners of conscience. Their relatives are liable to face the same treatment. Human rights defenders face systematic harassment. On several occasions during the last few weeks, the security forces prevented human rights defenders from holding solidarity meetings in support of Hamma Hammami and his colleagues in Tunis, and also in Bizerte in the north and Sfax in the south. On 25 January, the security forces again prevented participants from gaining access to the Tunis office of the *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme* (LTDH), Tunisian Human Rights League, where a meeting was due to take place. The head of Hamma Hammami's Support Committee, Salah Hamzaoui, reported that the police had

visited him on 21 January 2002 stating that he was not authorized to receive anybody in his house. Since then, his house has reportedly been surrounded by members of the security forces.

Hamma Hammami is a founding member of PCOT, and remains a prominent figure in the party. He is also the director of the banned newspaper *El Badil* ("The Alternative"), which is considered to have links with PCOT. Since his first arrest in 1972 when he was a student, Hamma Hammami has been arrested and tortured several times. His wife, Radhia Nasraoui, and their children, have been repeatedly harassed by members of the security forces. Amnesty International has previously adopted Hamma Hammami, and other PCOT members, as prisoners of conscience.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals in Arabic, French, English or your own language:**

- seeking assurances that Hamma Hammami, Abdeljabbar Madouri, Samir Taamallah and Ammar Amroussia will under no circumstances be tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for their relatives to be protected against all forms of harassment and for the intimidation of human rights defenders who support them to be stopped immediately;
- calling for the sentences passed on Hamma Hammami, Abdeljabbar Madouri, Samir Taamallah and Ammar Amroussia to be annulled.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Justice

M. Bechir TAKKARI

Ministre de la Justice

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31 Boulevard Bab Benat

1006 Tunis

Tunisia

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**E-mail: mju@ministeres.tn**

**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisia**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

Minister of the Interior

M. Abdallah KAABI

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Ministère de l'Intérieur

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**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

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Tunisia

**Fax:+ 216 71 256 766**

**Salutation: Son Excellence/ Your Excellency**

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 13 March 2002.