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## **Tunisia: Free Néjib Hosni, prisoner of conscience**

*On the occasion of the international day of solidarity, on April 28 2001, with prisoner of conscience Néjib Hosni, a human rights lawyer imprisoned in Tunisia, Amnesty International is launching an appeal for his immediate and unconditional release and for an end to the attacks and intimidation which still continue against human rights defenders.*

*"The case of Néjib Hosni, imprisoned because of his activities on behalf of victims of repression, is an example of the relentless campaign to which human rights defenders are increasingly being subjected," Amnesty International said today.*

*Néjib Hosni, who has received numerous international prizes for his committed work in defence of human rights and is a founder member of the *Conseil national des libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT), National Council for Liberties in Tunisia, was imprisoned in June 1994 on a trumped-up charge of forgery. After being sentenced, without evidence, to eight years in prison in an unfair trial in 1996, he was conditionally released at the end of the same year after an international campaign of solidarity.*

*He was re-arrested in December 2000 and sentenced to 15 days in prison for "non-compliance" with a judicial decision which banned him from practising his profession as a lawyer for five years. This ban was arbitrary since it was in breach of current texts regulating the legal profession. They state that the Tunisian Bar Council is the only body authorized to decide whether a lawyer may be suspended or disbarred.*

In January 2001, after having served his sentence, Néjib Hosni was kept in detention in accordance with a decision by the Minister of the Interior to repeal the order conditionally releasing him in December 1996. Néjib Hosni is now being forced to complete the remaining five and a half years of the eight-year sentence imposed in the 1996 trial.

Before and after his previous detention, Néjib Hosni, along with his wife and children, were constantly subjected to all forms of harassment and intimidation by the Tunisian authorities, notably the confiscation of his passport, the cutting of their telephone lines, constant surveillance and the threat of new judicial proceedings.

"However, in spite of the pressure exerted on him and his family, Néjib Hosni has not renounced his commitment to the defence of human rights and the victims of repression. It is because of this that he is back in prison today," Amnesty International stressed.

Furthermore, the attacks and intimidation, to which human rights defenders are subjected on a daily basis, have reached an unprecedented level. The imprisonment of Néjib Hosni, the suspension of the activities of the *Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme* (LTDH), Tunisian Human Rights League, the increase in judicial proceedings against the leaders of the LTDH and the CNLT, as well as physical attacks on the leaders and activists of these and other civil associations, are only a few examples of the deterioration in the human rights situation in Tunisia.

Amnesty International calls on the Tunisian authorities to:

- immediately and unconditionally release Néjib Hosni, allow him to immediately resume his profession as a lawyer, and guarantee him freedom of movement in Tunisia and abroad;

*- immediately put an end to the pressure and attacks on human rights defenders and civil society activists, and allow them to carry out their activities without threat or interference*

**\ENDS**

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