

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 30/03/97

UA 03/97

"Disappearance" / Fear of torture /  
Possible prisoner of conscience

7 January 1997

TUNISIAMoncef ZIDI

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Amnesty International is gravely concerned at the "disappearance" of Moncef Zidi since his arrest on 30 December 1996. He has been held in secret detention since that date and his current whereabouts are unknown, heightening fears for his safety.

Moncef Zidi was arrested when he presented himself to the police station in his home town of Korba, about 70 kilometres from the capital, Tunis. He was later reportedly transferred to the police station in the neighbouring town of Nabeul. On inquiring at the police station in Korba about the reasons for her husband's arrest, his wife was informed that it was due to the non-payment of a fine incurred following a previous court hearing. She paid the fine and took the receipt to the police in Nabeul. However, officials at Nabeul police station have repeatedly denied all knowledge of his arrest and detention. Repeated inquiries by his wife and lawyers, and by the Tunisian Human Rights League, with the judicial authorities, the Ministry of the Interior, and the security forces, have yielded no results to date.

Moncef Zidi was previously arrested in 1993 and subsequently tried and sentenced, *in absentia*, to six months' imprisonment on charges of belonging to the unauthorized *Partie communiste des ouvriers tunisiens*, (PCOT), Tunisian Workers' Communist Party. In November 1996 he petitioned the court to retry his case (according to Tunisian law those who have been tried and sentenced *in absentia* have the right to retrial). The first two hearings of the case took place on 12 November and 17 December 1996 and Moncef Zidi was present in court on both occasions. He is on bail for this case and no other arrest warrant has been issued against him, according to the judicial authorities.

However, on 22 December security officers searched the home of Moncef Zidi's brother without showing any search warrant. They were reportedly looking for Moncef Zidi and are alleged to have threatened to arrest his brother in his place.

Amnesty International is concerned for the well-being of Moncef Zidi, especially in view of the continuing practice by the Tunisian authorities of submitting suspected political opposition activists and their relatives to torture and ill-treatment during secret detention.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Arrests, detentions, torture and ill-treatment, imprisonment of prisoners of conscience, unfair trials and systematic harassment have been increasingly used in Tunisia to punish, intimidate and silence opposition political activists, government critics, human rights activists and others in Tunisia over the past few years.

Amnesty International has continued to document and condemn such human rights violations in Tunisia, and to call on the Tunisian authorities to take concrete steps to put an end to such practices. In the past few weeks five well-known prisoners of conscience who were serving sentences of up to 11 years were conditionally released. However, they are prevented from exercising their civil rights and remain under close surveillance; at least one of them has been rearrested and held for one night in the Ministry of the Interior. Amnesty

International has welcomed the release of these prisoners of conscience as a positive step, and continues to call for the release of the remaining prisoners of conscience and for measures to be taken to end the ongoing human rights violations in Tunisia.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, Arabic, English or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the "disappearance" of Moncef Zidi after his arrest on 30 December 1996;
- seeking information about his current place of detention and legal status;
- urging that he be immediately and unconditionally released if he is being held solely on account of the peaceful expression of his opinions;
- expressing concern that he may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment whilst he is held in secret detention, and asking that he be allowed prompt access to his family, lawyers, and to independent medical assistance if necessary.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) Minister of Justice

M. Sadok Chaâbane  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
Boulevard Bab Benat  
Tunis  
Tunisia

**Faxes: +216 1 568 106**

**Telexes: 13000 maet tn (via Ministère de l'Intérieur)**

**Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice Chaâbane, Tunis, Tunisie**

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

2) Minister of the Interior

M. Mohamed Jegham  
Ministre de l'Intérieur  
Ministère de l'Intérieur  
Av. Habib Bourguiba  
Tunis  
Tunisia

**Fax: +216 1 340888**

**Telex: 13662 sdap tn**

**Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur, Tunis, Tunisia**

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

**COPIES TO:**

Tunisian Human Rights League

Me Taoufik Bouderbala, Président  
**Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH**  
7 Rue Pierre Curie  
TUNIS  
Tunisia  
**Faxes: + 216 1 336 338**

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 20 February 1997.