

7 March 1997

Further information on UA 208/96 (MDE 30/23/96, 22 August 1996) and follow-up (MDE 30/24/96, 27 August) - Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Probable prisoners of conscience / Fear of arrest as POC and new concern: "Disappearance" / Prisoner of conscience

TUNISIA Abdel Moumen BELANES, student

Amnesty International has received information that Abdel Moumen Belanes was arrested by members of the national guard outside Monastir court on 6 March 1997. A warrant for his arrest is reported to have been issued by the juge d'instruction (investigating judge) of Ariana. He had been attending a hearing of the retrial of the 1992 case in which he had been sentenced in absentia to one year and five months imprisonment for membership of the Union de la Jeunesse Communiste, (UJC), Young Communists Union and participating in unauthorized meetings. According to Tunisian law those who have been tried and sentenced in absentia have the right to retrial.

Abdel Moumen Belanes has been held in secret detention since his arrest and his current whereabouts are unknown. Amnesty International fears for his safety, given the continuing practice of submitting suspected political opposition activists and their relatives to torture and ill-treatment during secret detention, and particularly in light of the fact that during a five-month period of detention from November 1995 to April 1996 he had been held for over two weeks in illegally prolonged incommunicado detention in the Ministry of the Interior and severely tortured. The torture to which he is said to have been submitted included beatings on various parts of his body, suspension in contorted positions and sleep and food deprivation.

Amnesty International had previously feared on 17 August 1996 that Abdel Moumen Belanes was being targeted for rearrest, when his house was searched during his absence. Other students with whom he had been detained from November 1995 to April 1996 were rearrested on that date and held in incommunicado detention for one week, during which time they were submitted to torture. Abdel Moumen Belanes went into hiding.

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 December 1996 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.

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

- expressing concern at the "disappearance" following his arrest on 6 March 1997 of Abdel Moumen Belanes, and seeking information about his current place of detention;

- calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience;

- 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 access to his family, lawyers and to independent medical assistance if necessary; if possible also:

- call for a full, impartial and independent investigation to be carried out into the allegations of the torture and ill-treatment of Abdel Moumen Belanes during illegally prolonged incommunicado detention in November 1995, and that the results of this investigation be made public.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Justice

M. Abdallah Kallel

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 Ben Rejeb

Ministre de l'Intérieur

Ministère de l'Intérieur

Av. Habib Bourguiba

Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: +216 1 340888

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur, Tunis, Tunisie

Telex: 13662 sdap tn

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 April 1997. EXTERNAL
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