

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 30/28/97

UA 142/97 Prisoner of conscience / Fear of ill-treatment

14 May 1997

TUNISIA Abdel Moumen BELANES, student

Amnesty International is disturbed by information just received that prisoner of conscience Abdel Moumen Belanes has been denied visits by his lawyers since 26 April 1997 and by his family since 29 April. The organization fears that he may be being subjected to ill-treatment or torture in prison.

Abdel Moumen Belanes has undertaken hunger-strikes in the past in protest at his detention as a prisoner of conscience. It is possible that he is undertaking another hunger-strike on these grounds, raising fears that he may be suffering ill-treatment as a result. Prisoners on hunger-strike in Tunisia have often been punished by being held chained and undressed in solitary confinement.

Abdel Moumen Belanes has been the subject of thousands of international appeals on his behalf during 1996 and 1997 following an earlier Urgent Action on his behalf (UA 208/96 (MDE 30/23/96, 22 August 1996) and updates). Amnesty International is deeply concerned that the health and safety of this prisoner of conscience, who should be immediately and unconditionally released, may once again be under threat.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Abdel Moumen Belanes was arrested on 6 March 1997 outside Monastir court on 6 March 1997. 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 was held in secret detention for four days after arrest, during which time he was allegedly threatened with torture. During an earlier period of detention from November 1995 to April 1996 he was held for over two weeks in illegally prolonged incommunicado detention in the Ministry of the Interior and severely tortured.

Abdel Moumen Belanes was tried on 1 April on charges of disturbing public order, and sentenced to one year's imprisonment on 8 April. Amnesty International is concerned that the trial was not conducted in accordance with international standards of fairness. A request by the defence lawyers to cross-examine the only defence witness, a prison guard, was turned down by the court. The defence lawyers further stated, that in spite of repeated requests to the court, they were not provided with copies of statements made by the prison guard and the Director-General of the Prisons Administration, both of which were mentioned in the charge sheet.

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

- expressing concern that Abdel Moumen Belanes has been denied visits by his lawyers since 26 April 1997 and family members since 29 April 1997;
- urging that he been allowed immediate access to his family, lawyers, and also to independent medical assistance if necessary;
- seeking assurances that he is not being subjected to any form of ill-treatment;

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Abdel Moumen Belanes as a prisoner of conscience.

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, 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'Interieur, Tunis, Tunisia

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 2 July 1997.