

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 133/92 Prolonged incommunicado detention/Fear of torture

TUNISIA: Zouhair Mhiri - Literature teacher, aged 24

Amnesty International is concerned that Zouhair Mhiri is being held incommunicado in prolonged *garde à vue* detention beyond the maximum 10 days allowed by Tunisian law, and may be at risk of torture.

Zouhair Mhiri is a 24-year-old European literature teacher in Ain al-Drahim. He is the brother of Khaled Mhiri, a well-known member and activist of the illegal Islamist organization *al-Nahda* (Renaissance). On 13 April 1992, the Mhiri family house was searched and a photograph of Zouhair's brother, Khaled, with the president of *al-Nahda*, Rachid Ghanouchi, was confiscated. Their father was taken to the police station and interrogated for a whole day. Zouhair Mhiri was arrested two days later on 15 April. He is said to have been taken to the Ministry of the Interior where it is feared he may be tortured.

Amnesty International fears that Zouhair Mhiri may be held only as a means of punishing the family for the activities of his brother.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Zouhair's brother, Khaled Mhiri, was arrested in August 1987 and was detained for over three weeks in incommunicado *garde à vue* detention. Khaled Mhiri fled from Tunisia in 1988 and since then has obtained political asylum in the United Kingdom. In January 1990 Zouhair applied for a passport in order to enable him to travel to the United States where he had been accepted at the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. Although he had a police certificate stating that he had never been in any trouble, and allegedly had no links with any political movements, his passport application was rejected by the authorities in Tunisia. No formal reasons were given for this.

Over the past 18 months, Amnesty International has received constant reports of thousands of Tunisians who have been arrested, tortured and held incommunicado for protracted periods. Whilst the Tunisian Government continues to proclaim that torture is unacceptable, it has failed to conduct impartial investigations into widespread torture allegations, make public its findings, bring perpetrators to justice and compensate the victims.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- expressing concern that Zouhair Mhiri is being held illegally in prolonged *garde à vue* detention, for longer than the 10-day maximum allowed by Tunisian law;
- expressing concern that he may be tortured while held in incommunicado detention;
- urging that he be allowed immediate access to his family and lawyers, and that he receive any necessary medical attention;

- calling upon the Tunisian Government to immediately and unconditionally release Zouhair Mhiri unless he is charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial.

APPEALS TO:

1. Minister of the Interior:

M. Abdallah Kallel
Ministre de l'Interieur
Ministère de l'Interieur
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
Tunis, Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Tunis, Tunisia

Telexes: 13662 sdap tn

[Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency]

2. Minister of Justice:

M. Abderrahim Zouari
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
Boulevard Bab Benat
Tunis, Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisia

Faxes: + 216 1 568 106

[Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency]

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

First Presidential Counsellor for Human Rights:

M. Sadok Chaabane
Conseiller Présidentiel chargé des Droits de l'Homme
Palais Présidentiel
Carthage/Tunis
Tunisie

Fax: + 216 1 744721; + 216 1 742513

[Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency]

PLEASE ALSO SEND COPIES OF SOME OF YOUR APPEALS, FOR INFORMATION, TO:

Human Rights Organization

Ligue Tunisienne de la Défense des Droits de l'Homme
23 rue du Yemen
Tunis, Tunisia

Faxes: + 216 1 795 466

and also to diplomatic representatives of Tunisia in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat or your section Office if sending appeals after 9 June 1992.