

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI index: MDE 30/003/2012
12 February 2012

Tunisian authorities must protect victims and their families in former officials' trial

Amnesty International urged the Tunisian authorities to ensure victims of human rights violations, their families, witnesses and lawyers are protected from harassment and intimidation as the trial of those accused of being responsible for the death of protesters during the uprising is taking place.

The trial of 23 officials charged for the killing of protesters during the 2011 uprising in Thala and Kasserine that began on 28 November before the military court in Kef has been marred by reports that security officers have been threatening witnesses, lawyers and families of victims either directly or in public statements on television or other forms of media. Lawyers have told Amnesty International of direct threats they have received and of witnesses being threatened with losing their jobs.

Amnesty International deplored that several officers charged with the killing of protesters have not been suspended and continue to carry out their duties, compounding the fears of the families of victims that they will not be held accountable for their actions.

One of the defendants, Moncef Laajimi, was the director of the riot police ('*Quwat al Tadakhol*') in the northern region of Tunisia, including the towns of Thala and Kasserine, during the uprising. He has been charged for giving the orders to shoot protesters in the region. The families of victims resented that he remained free and was even promoted following the uprising to become the General Director of that police force. On 28 December, in the only court session he has attended so far for questioning, he was escorted by a large number of security officers who according to lawyers and others present threatened to storm the court if Moncef Laajimi was detained.

Moncef Laajimi was transferred from his job in January 2012 to a job within the Ministry of Interior. However, other officers remain in their positions.

Tunisian authorities are obliged under international law to ensure victims and their families are treated with respect and dignity and to ensure their safety, physical and psychological well-being and privacy. International human rights law and standards also provide that officials convicted of committing gross human rights violations should be dismissed from their positions. Pending a verdict by a court, all security officers being investigated for their involvement in the killing of protesters during the uprising and other serious human rights violations should be suspended.

More than a year has passed since the uprising in which 300 people, including those who died in incidents in prisons, and several hundred were injured. More than a year after the uprising, families of the victims are still waiting for truth and justice. Instead they are receiving threats.

Background information

Official figures state that at least 300 had died and 700 were injured in the protests that began in December 2010 and that led to former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fleeing the country less than a month later.

Victims of the uprising and their families began filing complaints against security officers and government officials they believed were responsible for human rights violations in civilian courts throughout Tunisia in the months following the protests. Initial court procedures and investigations were slow and investigating judges were reportedly either unwilling or unable to enforce summons for the suspected officials. All cases were transferred to military courts in Tunis, Kef and Sfax in May 2011 and are currently at different procedural stages.

A Fact-Finding Commission on Abuses Committed in the Last Period was set up in February 2011 to investigate human rights violations that took place during the uprising. However, the Commission has yet to published its findings more than a year after.