

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST SENTENCED AFTER UNFAIR TRIAL

Student activist Mohammed Soudani was sentenced following an unfair trial on 24 October, to four months' imprisonment. He was arrested on 22 October after meeting with two French journalists and was held incommunicado until 9 November.

Mohammed Soudani was detained incommunicado in circumstances amounting to an enforced disappearance for almost three weeks in Mornaguia Prison, in the outskirt of the Tunisian capital of Tunis, before his family were permitted to visit him on 12 November 2009. Security officers informed Mohammed Soudani's family of his whereabouts on 9 November.

Mohammed Soudani has stated that he had been arrested on 22 October, by state security officers and was beaten up during the arrest. He was taken to a doctor by the security officers, who feared he had been seriously injured in the beating. After being examined and treated for minor injuries, he was then taken to Mornaguia Prison without being interrogated. Mohammed Soudani was presented before a judge on 24 October, who interrogated him without the presence of his lawyer. He was convicted on 31 October after an unfair trial, in which he had no legal representation, on charges of drunkenness, disorderly behaviour and harming public morality. He was sentenced to four months' imprisonment and he has now lodged an appeal against the sentence.

Mohammed Soudani was arrested after giving interviews to two French radio journalists who were covering the presidential and legislative elections that took place in Tunisia on 25 October 2009. The Tunisian authorities clamped down on peaceful critics of the government in the weeks before and after the national elections. During this period several journalists, human rights and civil society activists have been harassed, physically assaulted and detained on trumped up charges. Amnesty International believes that Mohammed Soudani was arrested for giving interviews to critics of the Tunisian authorities and that he is a prisoner of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and opinion.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to release Mohammed Soudani immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 DECEMBER 2009 TO:

President
Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
President
Palais Présidentiel
Tunis
Tunisia
Fax: + 216 71 744 721
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice and Human Rights
Béchar Tekkari
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis - La Kasbah
Tunisia
Fax: + 216 71 568 106
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
Ridha Khemakhem
General Coordinator for Human Rights
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis - La Kasbah
Tunisia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Tunisia accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

This is the first update of UA 295/09 (MDE 30/014/2009). See www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE30/014/2009/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

After his enforced disappearance on 22 October, Mohammed Soudani's lawyer filed a complaint with the Tunis Public Prosecutor as he was unable to find out any information on the whereabouts of his client. When he was first detained, Mohammed Soudani's family was not informed of his arrest or whereabouts as required under Tunisian law and his father was unable to obtain any information on him from the police in the city of Mahdia, 200km south of Tunis, where Mohammed Soudani lives. His mother reported that on 2 November security officers came home to arrest Mohammed Soudani, whereas another local authority told them the same day that he had been arrested on 22 October, interrogated and released.

Mohammed Soudani was expelled from university in 2007 because of his activities within the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET). He told Amnesty International during a meeting in October 2009, that he had been previously arrested on 29 June 2007 and detained for 12 days, during which he said he was tortured, and then sentenced to a six month suspended prison sentence. He also said he was again detained for another six days in October 2008, stripped of his clothes and beaten. He has been prosecuted several times, and has served a two-month prison term. He believes that the charges brought against him are related to his activism for the UGET. Amnesty International believes that on 22 October 2009, the French journalists were interviewing Mohammed Soudani because he is an active member within the student movement, UGET.

Further information on UA: 295/09 Index: MDE 30/017/2009 Issue Date: 18 November 2009

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