

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 30/014/2005 (Public)  
News Service No: 238  
2 September 2005

### **Tunisia: In total disregard for the spirit of the WSIS, restrictions on judges and journalists reinforced**

Amnesty International is seriously concerned about further restrictions on the independence of the judiciary and on freedom of expression in Tunisia, as judges and journalists continue to be intimidated and harassed, in total disregard for the spirit of the World Summit on Information Society to be held in November 2005 in Tunis.

On 29 August, the president of the Association of Tunisian Judges (*Association des Magistrats Tunisiens*, AMT) was summoned by the State Prosecutor to the Court of First Instance in Tunis. He was asked to hand back the keys to the association's office and leave the premises, reportedly following orders from the Ministry of Justice and Human rights. In the absence of any administrative or judicial decision, the president of AMT refused to hand in the keys. On 31 August, a new lock was put on the door of the office, leaving the association without a proper place to hold meeting or carry out its normal activities.

Depriving the AMT of its office came as part of a series of measures taken by the Tunisian authorities ostensibly to intimidate judges and restrict their activities and their right to freedom of expression. Following recent calls for more independence of the judiciary, the office of the AMT had its telephone, fax and internet access frequently disconnected. Many judges were also reportedly arbitrarily transferred to remote places in the country, away from their families, in an apparent attempt to intimidate and silence them.

Such practices undermine the independence of the judiciary and are inconsistent with both Tunisian and international law. Amnesty International calls on the Tunisian authorities to allow the ATM to reopen its office in order to enable judges to carry out their activities, and to show greater respect for the independence of the judiciary in compliance with the country's obligations under international human rights law.

The organization is also worried about the Tunisian authorities' decision to prevent the Union of Tunisian Journalists (*Syndicat des Journalistes Tunisiens*, SJT) from holding its first congress and a planned seminar on 7 September. The event is supposed to host hundreds of independent Tunisian journalists as well as representatives of international and regional journalists' organizations. Since the creation of the Union in May 2004, its president, Lotfi Hajji, was summoned several times to the security department of the ministry of interior for interrogation about the activities of the Union. The SJT aims to defend the rights of journalist and promote freedom of the press.

Amnesty International calls on the Tunisian authorities to end its harassment of journalists and to allow the SJT members to exercise their right to freedom of association and expression. This includes allowing the SJT to hold meetings and carry out its activities.