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EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 29/07/89
Distrib : PG/SC

Date: 14 September 1989

MEDICAL CONCERN

Prolonged hunger strike MOROCCO

Amnesty International is concerned for the well-being of two young men currently on hunger-strike in Morocco and of a third who is reported to have stopped his hunger-strike at the end of August 1989. The three -Hassan Aharrat, Nouredine Jouhari (both still refusing to take food) and Moulay Tahar Douraidi - together with three other young students, commenced their action in June 1985 in protest, among other things, against inadequate medical care for injuries suffered under ill-treatment and torture during a period of incommunicado police detention. In August 1985 the prisoners were transferred to Averroes Hospital where they are still held. Since their transfer to hospital they have been forcibly fed by gastric tube, kept in isolation in individual rooms and not permitted to receive any visits or correspondence. Their rooms are guarded by police.

In June 1989, all three prisoners were reported to have commenced vomiting and diarrhoea possibly due to a gastric infection. All became seriously ill but recovered. It is not known what treatment they received.

In August 1989, Moulay Tahar Douraidi was reported by the authorities to have stopped his hunger strike and to have been returned to prison. However, no independent witness has met or spoken with him and there is continuing concern for his well-being. The prisoners remaining on hunger-strike are believed to be in very poor health (described in one press report as "just skin and bones"). They are thought to remain in isolation in the basement of Averroes hospital strapped to their beds. Guards forcibly feed them by gastric tube and they were reported, at least until recently, to be regularly sedated by intramuscular injection of Dolosal [pethidine hydrochloride], Largactil [chlorpromazine hydrochloride] and/or Phenergan [promethazine hydrochloride]. It is reported that recently there has been no contact between hospital doctors and the prisoners and that medical care has been given by guards based on opinions and recommendations of two hospital doctors in response to guards' descriptions of the prisoners' condition.

In 1988, Amnesty International received information that the hunger-strikers were bathed and had their bed-linen and clothing changed only every four to six months. It is believed that there have been no changes in this practice and that therefore the state of hygiene experienced by the prisoners is incompatible with a hospital environment. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that individuals staying in a hospital should be kept in such conditions with no free and confidential access to medical advice and care.

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Background

In January 1984, 31 young men (including six who later went on unlimited hunger strike) were arrested in the wake of widespread demonstrations against increases in food prices. They were tried in Marrakech in May 1984 accused of conspiracy to overthrow the monarchical government. Moulay Douraidi was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, Hassan Aharrat to 15 years' and Nouredine Jouhari to eight years' imprisonment. They are all under investigation by Amnesty International as possible prisoners of conscience. Shortly after the trial, 27 of the prisoners began a series of intermittent hunger strikes. In July and August 1984, three of them died, one of whom was the 18-year-old brother of Moulay Douraidi.

Six of these then began their unlimited hunger-strike in June 1985 and were transferred to Averroes hospital two months later. Three of the six were released between January 1988 and March 1989 on expiry of their sentences. A French doctor who saw two of the released hunger-strikers shortly after each left prison in early 1988 and 1989 described both as showing signs of muscular atrophy and general debilitation; one suffered oedema at the ankles after walking 300 metres and the other could not stand unaided. The doctor was told that the man released in 1988 looked like a "caveman" upon release with long unkempt hair and long dirty fingernails.

[In another hunger-strike by prisoners in the capital, Rabat, one hunger-striker died on 19 August in Avicennes Hospital; three others in the same hospital are seriously ill. The hunger-strikers are protesting on issues relating to medical care. AI has issued appeals in this case, most recently on 22 August (see UA 320/89; MDE 29/06/89) and 14 September (MDE 29/08/89).]