

UA 36/01

Fear for

TUNISIAJalel Zoghlami

Fathi Zoghlami, brother of the above

Fathi Dbek

Salah Hnid

Abdelmoumen Belanes

Tarek Mahzaoui

Omar Mestiri, Secretary General of the *Conseil National des libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT)Other human rights defenders and critics of the government

At least seven people, including human rights defenders, have been assaulted by security forces outside the home of a former prisoner of conscience, who is currently on hunger strike. Following the assault, some 20 people took shelter in the house, where they remain for fear of leaving while the security forces are stationed outside. Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

A number of people, including the seven mentioned above, were attacked and injured by plain-clothed and uniformed security agents, who beat them with iron bars and sticks. Fathi Dbek sustained a fracture to a bone in his shoulder. Salah Hnid, Abdelmoumen Belanes and Tarek Mahzaoui sustained head injuries. Jalel Zoghlami, his brother Fathi, and Omar Mestiri, Secretary General of the *Conseil National des libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT), National Council for Liberties in Tunisia, were kicked and beaten on the legs and other parts of the body.

The attack took place in the evening of 6 February as former prisoner of conscience Jalel Zoghlami returned home from hospital accompanied by a group of human rights defenders, lawyers, former prisoners of conscience and other friends. The security forces were waiting in large numbers outside his house, and attacked him, his companions, and other people who had come to show solidarity with Jalel Zoghlami.

The Security forces kept Jalel Zoghlami's house under guard the entire night and throughout the following day. They have insisted that the more than 20 people sheltering there, including those injured in the attack, leave the house. However, those inside are afraid to leave while the security forces are present outside.

This latest incident follows an attack on Jalel Zoghlami, which took place on 3 February at around 5pm. Zoghlami was beaten by five men armed with clubs and iron bars, who attacked him on the streets of Tunis as he was making his way home. He managed to escape by seeking refuge at a car hire agency. His attackers are believed to be members of the security forces. Later that day, Zoghlami decided to go on a hunger strike to protest against the attack and other forms of harassment against him and his family.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Amnesty International is gravely concerned by this latest incident, which takes place in the context of an unprecedented crackdown on human rights defenders and government critics. In recent months the Tunisian authorities have increasingly targeted human rights defenders and anyone who has spoken out against the deteriorating human rights situation in the country.

In November 2000 the authorities closed down and took control of the office of the *Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme* (LTDH), Tunisian Human Rights League, and suspended its activities. In December 2000 a spokesperson for the *Conseil National des libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT), National Council for Liberties in Tunisia, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment on charges of "spreading false information" (that is for speaking out against human rights violations) and "maintaining an unauthorized association" (that is the CNLT). Also in December, human rights lawyer and CNLT leading member Nejib Hosni was jailed for his work as a human rights lawyer. Other CNLT and LTDH members, as well as members of other human rights associations, including the *Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* (ATDF), Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, have been ill-treated by police, prosecuted for their human rights work, prevented from meeting in homes or public places and threatened. Human rights lawyers and defenders continue to be harassed and followed and their telephone lines are disconnected most of the time.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing grave concern at the attacks on Jalel Zoghlami and those supporting him, asking the authorities to guarantee their safety;
- calling for an immediate end to such practices;
- urging the authorities to instigate a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into this and other recent attacks, and for those responsible to be brought justice;
- calling on the authorities to put an immediate end to the targeting of human rights defenders and government critics;

APPEALS TO:

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COPIES TO:

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and to diplomatic representatives of TUNISIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 March 2001.