

PUBLIC

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UA 75/06 Prisoner of conscience/Fear for safety

TUNISIA Mohammed Abbou (m), Lawyer and HRD

Prisoner of conscience Mohamed Abbou has been on hunger strike since 11 March 2006 in protest against his continued detention and harassment by prison administration at El-Kef prison. He lost consciousness during a visit by his family on 30 March, and his life may be at risk. Amnesty International is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

During his family's visit on 30 March, Mohammed Abbou looked weak and was unable to walk or stand without being supported. He reported that on more than one occasion prison guards woke him up in the middle of the night and searched his cell. He told his wife that, following his request to move from the prison cell he shared with prisoners convicted of common offences, he had been kicked and punched by the prison guards. His mattress was also removed so that he now has to sleep on an iron bedstead. He also reported that at his request, a prison doctor had visited him around 23 March. However, the doctor had not examined him, prescribed any medicines or given him any treatment. Upon hearing Mohammed Abbou's complaints to his wife regarding his ill-treatment, the prison guards interrupted the visit by closing the shutter separating prisoners and visitors, forcing Mohammed Abbou and his family to shout in order to communicate. Shortly afterwards, Mohammed Abbou fainted.

On 23 March, his family came to visit him but were told by prison guards that he was being punished for refusing to re-enter his cell and could not receive any visitors. On 16 March, a visit by his sister was ended by prison guards shortly after they heard that Mohammed Abbou's wife was in Geneva promoting his case with other human rights activists.

In April 2005, Mohammed Abbou, a lawyer and human rights defender, was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison, largely for publishing two internet articles critical of the Tunisian authorities and denouncing torture in Tunisia. His sentence was confirmed on appeal in June 2005, and he is currently imprisoned in El-Kef, approximately 200 kilometres from his family home in Tunis, making family visits difficult.

In November 2005, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions of the UN concluded that the detention of Mohammed Abbou is indeed arbitrary and is in violation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It also called on the Tunisian government to meet international standards in regard to Mohammed Abbou's case.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the health of Mohammed Abbou, who has been on a hunger strike since 11 March in protest against his continued imprisonment;
- calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience, jailed solely for the legitimate and peaceful expression of his beliefs;
- noting that the detention of Muhammed Abbou is in violation of article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights and article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as concluded by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions of the UN.

APPEALS TO:

M. Béchir Tekkari
Ministère de la Justice et de Droits de l'Homme
31 Boulevard Bab Benat

1006 Tunis - La Kasbah
Tunisie
Fax: + 216 71 568 106
E-mail: mju@ministeres.tn
Salutation: Your excellency/Excellence

Président M. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Président de la République
Palais Présidentiel
Tunis
Tunisie
Fax: + 216 71 744 721 / 731 009
Salutation: Your excellency/Excellence

COPIES TO:

M. Zakaria Ben Mustapha (Président)
Official human rights body reporting to the president
Comité supérieur des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales
85 ave de la Liberté
1002 Tunis-Belvédère
Tunisie
Fax: +216 71 796 593 / 784 038
Salutation: Dear Sir

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 11 May 2006.