

PUBLIC

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UA 104/99 Arrest of trade unionists/prisoners of conscience 11 May 1999

TUNISIA  
Abdeljalil BEDOUI, economist, university lecturer  
Ali ROMDHANE, agronomist  
Abdelmajid SAHRAOUI  
Hamed NJIMA  
Abdennour MADDEHI, agronomist  
Lahbib BEN ACHOUR  
Chaker BELHASSEN  
Hechmi LAQHAL  
Noureddine OUNISS

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The 9 trade unionists named above were arrested between the evening of 10 May 1999 and the morning of 11 May. It is believed that they were arrested solely for criticising the running of their trade union and alleging that it was controlled by the government. Amnesty International considers all 9 to be prisoners of conscience.

All are former senior members of the *Union générale des travailleurs tunisiens* (General Union of Tunisian Workers), UGTT. They were all arrested at their homes, except for Abdelmajid Sahraoui, who was arrested on his way home from a reception at the US embassy in the company of his fiancée. All were detained by plainclothes members of the security forces, who showed no arrest warrants. Ali Romdhane's house and Abdelmajid Sahraoui's cars were searched and papers were taken, but no search warrant was presented to those arrested or their families. The homes of some of the others were also reportedly searched.

Their arrests are believed to be linked to their criticisms of the UGTT's leadership. Most of them had been excluded from the UGTT over the past few years, and in April 1999, at the time of the UGTT's annual general meeting, these 9 and a number of others criticized the way in which the UGTT was run and issued petitions and complaints.

In 1997, Abdelmajid Sahraoui, who was one of a number of UGTT leaders arrested after they wrote to the UGTT's Secretary General complaining about the running of the UGTT and alleging that the union was controlled by the Tunisian authorities. They were detained on charges of offending state institutions.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The human rights situation in Tunisia has deteriorated steadily in recent years, and public liberties and freedom of expression and association have been increasingly curtailed. Thousands of ordinary people, including known or suspected supporters of opposition groups, trade unionists, journalists, academics, lawyers, human rights activists and others have been arrested and harassed over the past few years, and some are still detained or restricted in their movements.

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

- expressing concern at the arrest of the 9 men named above and urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior  
M. Ali Chaouch  
Ministre de l'Intérieur  
Ministère de l'Intérieur  
Avenue Habib Bourguiba  
1001 Tunis  
Tunisia

**Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Tunis, Tunisia**  
**Faxes: + 216 1 340 888**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice  
M. Abdallah Kallel  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
31 Boulevard Bab Benat  
1006 Tunis  
Tunisia

**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisia**

**Faxes: + 216 1 568 106**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

Tunisian Human Rights League  
Me Taoufik Bouderbala, Président  
Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH  
7 Rue Pierre Curie  
Tunis  
Tunisia

**Tel/fax: + 216 1 336 338**

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 22 June 1999.