

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 190/94 Prisoner of conscience / Torture / Medical Concern 17 May 1994

TUNISIA

Mohamed Hedi SASSI

Amnesty International is concerned at the detention of Mohamed Hedi Sassi as a prisoner of conscience and at reports that he was tortured during incommunicado detention in police custody.

Mohamed Hedi Sassi was reportedly arrested on 18 April 1994 and tortured during incommunicado detention in Bardo Police Station in Tunis. He stated to his lawyers and to the court that he was beaten while tied and suspended in contorted positions and had a liquid containing chemical products poured into his mouth and nose. The defence lawyer confirmed that bruises and marks were still visible on his forehead, wrists, legs and feet more than a week after his arrest. In addition Mohamed Sassi has complained of loss of hearing in one ear after being beaten with a truncheon.

He is charged with belonging to the unauthorized *Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens, PCOT*, (Tunisian Workers' Communist Party), distributing unauthorized leaflets, and writing slogans on walls, but he denies all the charges. The leaflets he is accused of distributing contained information concerning the recent trial of a PCOT leader and condemned the lack of freedom of expression in Tunisia. The slogan he is accused of writing quoted the verse "chains must be broken" from a poem by the Tunisian poet Belkacem Chebbi.

Mohamed Hedi Sassi had previously been sentenced *in absentia* to 18 months' imprisonment on similar charges and was in hiding. Although his arrest date is recorded in police statements as 23 April, his family and lawyer learned of his arrest on 18 April and for over a week they made repeated but unsuccessful inquiries with the authorities to obtain information on his whereabouts. The practice of falsifying arrest dates has often been used to hide the real duration of incommunicado detention, when detainees are tortured and ill-treated to force them to sign confessions which are then accepted by the courts as evidence against the accused.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In a new wave of repression over the past three months a number of known or suspected political opponents and government critics have been detained as prisoners of conscience or arbitrarily arrested for interrogation, and relatives of detainees have continued to suffer harassment. Foreign journalists and observers have also been expelled or refused entry to Tunisia and foreign printed media banned from circulating in the country.

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

- expressing concern at the detention of Mohamed Hedi Sassi as a prisoner of conscience and urging the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally;
- expressing concern at reports that he was tortured during incommunicado detention, and urging the authorities to carry out a full and independent investigation into the allegations of torture;
- expressing concern that he is reported to have suffered loss of hearing after being beaten, seeking assurance that he will be given a medical examination and any medical care he requires.

APPEALS TO:1) Minister of the Interior

M. Abdallah Kallal
 Ministre de l'Intérieur
 Ministère de l'Intérieur
 Av Habib Bourguiba
 Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: +216 1 340888 or +216 1 348 365

Telexes: 13662 sdap tn

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Intérieur Kallal, Tunis, Tunisie

Salutation: Votre Excellence / Your Excellency

2) Minister of Justice

M. Sadok Chaâbane
 Ministre de la Justice
 Ministère de la Justice
 Boulevard Bab Benat
 Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: +216 1 568 106 or +216 1 567 070

Telexes: 13000 maet tn (via Ministère de l'Intérieur)

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice Chaâbane, Tunis, Tunisie

Salutation: Votre Excellence / Your Excellency

3) Minister of Foreign Affairs

M. Habib Ben Yahia
 Ministre des Affaires étrangères
 Ministère des Affaires étrangères
 Place du Gouvernement
 La Kasbah
 Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: +216 1 791005

Telexes: 14470 mafta tn, 14471 mafta tn, 14472 mafta tn

Telegrams: Ministre des Affaires étrangères Ben Yahia, Tunis, Tunisie

Salutation: Votre Excellence / Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Ligue Tunisienne pour les Droits de l'Homme
 c/o Institut Arabe des Droits de l'Homme
 23, Avenue Mohieddine Klibi
 El Manar III
 1004 TUNIS, Tunisie
 Fax: +216 1 750 911

M. Iadh Ouederni

Conseiller présidentiel pour les Droits de l'Homme

Attaché à la Présidence de la République

Palais Présidentiel

Tunis/Carthage, Tunisie

faxes: +216 1 742 513 or +216 1 731 009

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 28 June 1994.