

PUBLIC

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UA 196/06 Health concern/Fear for safety

TUNISIA Mohammed Akrou (m), aged 54

Political prisoner Mohammed Akrou has been on hunger strike since 7 June 2006 to demand his release from prison and to protest against his conditions of imprisonment, denial of medical care and harassment by the prison authorities in the 9 avril prison in the capital Tunis. He is very weak as a result of his hunger strike, and his family have been refused permission to see him. They are extremely concerned for his safety and wellbeing.

Mohammed Akrou suffers from a heart condition. His gums are severely swollen and bleeding, causing him acute pain. He also suffers from pains in his chest which are believed to be the result of poor ventilation and damp in his prison cell. His requests to have regular medical treatment and to receive a diet appropriate to his medical condition have been denied. On around 8 July, Mohammed Akrou stopped drinking sugared water. He is now so weak that he cannot stand up, and his life is in serious danger. He is already weakened by hunger strikes he has undertaken during the past twelve months, which reportedly totalled 150 days. On 15 July Mohammed Akrou's family visited the prison, which is around 400 kilometres from their home. Prison authorities refused to let them see him, giving them no reason for this refusal.

Mohammed Akrou is married with six children. Correspondence between Mohammed Akrou and his family is either delayed or confiscated by the prison authorities, and his requests for books and newspapers are refused. His family have not received any correspondence from him since 20 June.

Mohammed Akrou is a former leader of the banned Islamist organization, *Ennahda*. He was arrested in 1991 and sentenced in 1992 by a military court in Bouchoucha district near the capital Tunis, to life imprisonment for belonging to *Ennahda* and plotting to overthrow the Tunisian government. This was later reduced to 30 years. A more recent reduction in his sentence means he is due to be released in around six years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In May 2001, a new law on prison administration (Law No. 2001-52 of 14 May 2001) increased rights for prisoners. The law guarantees basic rights, including free medical care, either inside prison or in hospital at the discretion of the prison doctor (Article 17-2) and a shower at least once a week (Article 17-4). Under the law, a prisoner may be granted special permission to visit a relative in case of serious illness or death (Article 18-1) and has the right to family visits (Article 18-2), correspondence (Article 18-3), and access to books and newspapers (Article 19-1). In practice, however, these provisions are widely disregarded.

Prison conditions in Tunisia fall short of minimum adequate standards. Hygiene is extremely poor, and prisoners rarely have access to showers and washing facilities. Cells are overcrowded, with most prisoners forced to share beds or sleep on the floor. Contagious diseases, particularly scabies, are widespread, and prisoners do not have access to adequate medical care. Additional discriminatory and arbitrary measures worsen the conditions of detention.

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

- expressing concern for the safety and wellbeing of Mohammed Akrou, who is reportedly being denied access to the medical care he needs;

- calling on the authorities to ensure that he be given immediate access to adequate medical care;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations under Tunisian law to ensure that all prisoners receive any medical care that they require;
- calling on the authorities to comply with the provisions of Law No. 2001-52 of 14 May 2001 with regard to Mohammed Akrouf, including by permitting him visits from his relatives and allowing him books and newspapers, and calling for an end to the interception of his personal mail.

APPEALS TO:

President

Président M. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Président de la République
Palais Présidentiel
Tunis
Tunisie

Fax: + 216 71 744 721

Salutation: Your Excellency/Excellence

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

M. Béchir Tekkari
Ministère de la Justice et des 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

COPIES TO:

Official human rights body reporting to the President

M. Zakaria Ben Mustapha (Président)
Comité supérieur des droits de l'homme et des libertés fondamentales
85 avenue de la Liberté
1002 Tunis-Belvédère
Tunisie

Fax: + 216 71 796 593

+ 216 71 784 038

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 29 August 2006.