

TUNISIA Lasad Jouhri (m), human rights defender

On 28 August at 10.35am Lasad Jouhri, a former prisoner of conscience and victim of torture, was assaulted by five plainclothes policemen. Lasad Jouhri has recently been the target of repeated incidents of harassment and intimidation by members of the security forces, including death threats.

Amnesty International believes that he continues to be at risk of further assaults by the police, as a consequence of his activities as a human rights defender on behalf of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Tunisia.

On the day of the attack, Lasad Jouhri had just left the office of human rights lawyer Mohamed Nouri in the centre of the capital Tunis and was trying to hail a taxi, when five plainclothes men asked him to produce his identification document. When Lasad Jouhri asked the men to show him their police identification, they proceeded to beat him with their fists, without further explanation or questioning.

Lasad Jouhri is disabled as a result of being repeatedly tortured in detention between 1991 and 1994. His right leg is now partially paralysed and he is forced to walk with the aid of a crutch and to take pain killers on a daily basis.

During the attack, the policemen snatched his crutch from him, broke it in two and pushed Lasad Jouhri to the ground. They then began beating him with the broken crutch, as well as delivering punches and kicks to his body. They particularly targeted his right knee, which is the part of his body worst affected by the injuries he sustained under torture. The breast pocket of his shirt was also torn in the attack. During the attack a traffic policeman tried to intervene, not knowing who the assailants were, but was told to keep away by the assailants after they had told him they were policemen.

After some 15 minutes, the attackers left Lasad Jouhri lying on the street, with his knee bleeding, as the crowd which had gathered around the scene grew larger. Unable to walk without aid, Lasad Jouhri managed to phone Mohamed Nouri, who helped him back to his nearby office. Lasad Jouhri was later taken to hospital and released after his injuries had been treated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Like many other Tunisian human rights defenders, Lasad Jouhri is constantly followed, harassed and often assaulted or threatened by plainclothes policemen. He has been a key figure in an ongoing campaign on behalf of hundreds of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners currently on hunger strike in Tunisia.

Their hunger strike, which began on 26 August, is a five-day protest to mark the 10th anniversary of two grossly unfair military trials in which 265 alleged members of the unauthorized Islamist movement, al-Nahda (Renaissance), were sentenced to heavy prison terms (see Amnesty International press release ATunisia: Ten years on - no justice for Bab Saadoun and Bouchoucha prisoners while civilians continue to be brought before military courts, AI Index MDE 30/015/2002, 28 August 2002). More than 100 of them are still in detention in harsh prison conditions.

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

- asking the authorities to take immediate action to ensure that Lasad Jouhri is not subjected to further torture or ill-treatment, threats or harassment by members of the security forces;
- demanding a full, impartial and independent investigation into the attack against Lasad Jouhri to be conducted promptly, with those responsible brought to justice;
- urging the authorities to ensure that other human rights defenders are not physically attacked, intimidated or harassed;
- expressing concern at the continued and increased attacks against human rights defenders and calling for their targeting, harassment and intimidation to cease immediately.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

M. Bechir Tekkari
31 Av. Bab Benat
1006 Tunis - La Kasbah
Tunisia

Telegram: Minister of Justice, Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 568 106

E-mail: mju@ministeres.tn

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

M. Hédi M=henni
Ministère de l=Intérieur
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
1000 Tunis
Tunisia

Telegram: Minister of the Interior, Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 340 880

E-mail: mint@ministeres.tn

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Minister for Human Rights

M. Mohamed Fethi Houidi
Boulevard 7 novembre
Tunis
Tunisia

Telegram: Minister for Human Rights, Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 712 330

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

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 10 October 2002.