

Web Action WA 28/05; AI Index MDE 30/020/2005

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[Action title]

Stark contradictions: Tunisia and the WSIS
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/ec-bhopal-eng>

[Action extract]

Extract

[Action text]

In 2001, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), an agency of the United Nations, selected Tunisia to host the second and concluding part of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), from 16 to 18 November 2005.

This was despite the Tunisian government's poor human rights record, including its imposition of severe constraints on freedom of expression. It was hoped, however, that the choice of Tunisia as a host country would prompt the Tunisian government to allow greater freedom and relax its controls on free speech and peaceful association. This has not occurred.

On the contrary, recent months have seen increasing harassment of Tunisian human rights defenders, stifling precisely the rights to free expression and to access and exchange information and ideas which the Summit is intended to promote.

The Tunisian authorities also operate systematic censorship of the Internet to deny Tunisians access to information.

As a result of such censorship, independent websites on Tunisia are now increasingly hosted outside the country. Those within the country who contribute critical articles to such websites run a serious risk, as they may be subjected to persecution and harassment by the state authorities.

In April 2005, the authorities jailed well-known lawyer and human rights defender Mohammed Abbou for three-and-a-half years for publishing critical articles on the Internet.

Mohammed Abbou had also used the Internet to condemn the use of torture in Tunisia in the aftermath of worldwide revelations about US soldiers' torture and abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison.

Mohammed Abbou is currently imprisoned at El-Kef, 200 kilometres from his home in Tunis where his family resides. His lawyers have reportedly been denied permission on several occasions to visit him in prison. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

[Call to action]

Write to President Ben Ali urging him to:

- lift all restrictions on human rights defenders and freedom of expression and access to information,
- ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Mohammed Abbou.

You can also write to your government to exert pressure on the Tunisian Authorities, through its delegates to the WSIS, to lift all restrictions on human rights defenders and freedom of expression and access to information.

[Sample letter]

Your Excellency,

I am deeply concerned at the continuing restrictions on freedom of expression and access to information in Tunisia as your government is hosting the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) this month. I am also concerned about the increasing harassment of Tunisian human rights defenders in the run-up to the summit, including the sentencing of lawyer and human rights defender Mohammed Abbou to three and half years in prison in April 2005 after he denounced torture and ill-treatment in Tunisia.

I am calling on you to release Mohammed Abbou immediately and unconditionally.

I also urge you to lift all restrictions on human rights defenders and freedom of expression and access to information, to ensure that Tunisia abides by its obligations to uphold freedom of expression and association under international law.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

[Target contact details]

No Contact details

[Image caption and copyright]

Mohammed Abbou
AI