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EU-TUNISIA ASSOCIATION COUNCIL: AMNESTY RAISES CONCERNS OVER NEW "ANTI-TERRORISM" LAW

(Brussels 29 September, 2003) As the Italian Presidency and the European Commission prepare for tomorrow's EU-Tunisia Association Council in Brussels, Amnesty International has released a briefing paper detailing its concerns about draft "anti-terrorism" legislation currently before the Tunisian parliament which could be used to stifle freedom of expression, and may increase the use of military courts.

See: "Tunisia: a new draft 'anti-terrorist' law will further undermine human rights: Amnesty International briefing for the EU-Tunisia Association Council" (5-page briefing paper available on www.amnesty-eu.org - go to documents page)

Given the EU's stated policy that "terrorism" must not be fought at the expense of human rights, Amnesty International calls on the Italian EU Presidency and the European Commission to engage the Tunisian government in serious discussion at tomorrow's talks about revising the proposed law or withdrawing it altogether.

"The EU and Tunisia both signed up to Article 2 of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement which bases their relations on respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law," Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office said.

"Amnesty has already voiced its concerns over existing 'anti-terrorism' legislation in Tunisia which has been used as a pretext for repression of political dissent. Under the new draft law tabled in the Tunisian Chamber of Deputies in June, acts of freedom of expression advocating change in government policies - actions which are totally consistent with international law - could be considered acts of 'terrorism'," he warned.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to urge Tunisia to fulfil its obligations under international human rights law and the Association Agreement by revising the draft "anti-terrorism" legislation, in line with international human rights standards, to ensure that measures to combat "terrorism" and to enhance security are embedded in a solid human rights framework.

In particular, the EU should seek safeguards from Tunisia that people suspected of and convicted for involvement in "terrorism" are not subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, have the right to a trial in accordance with international fair trial standards and without the imposition of the death penalty.

In concrete terms, the EU should engage Tunisia in a specific programme of action which would bring the country's laws and practices in line with its obligations under national and international law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Documents available on www.amnesty-eu.org:

*"Tunisia: a new draft "anti-terrorism" law may further undermine human rights:
Amnesty International briefing for the EU-Tunisia Association Council September 2003*

*"Tunisia: Breaking the cycle of injustice - Recommendations to the European Union
June 2003"*

"Tunisia: the cycle of injustice June 2003"

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