

PUBLIC

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UA 290/05 Fear for safety/Intimidation

TUNISIA **Christophe Boltanski (m), journalist, French national**
Radhia Nasraoui (f), lawyer
Mokhtar Trifi (m), lawyer
Other human rights defenders, journalists and international observers

A French journalist and two Tunisian human rights defenders have been attacked and intimidated in the capital, Tunis, in recent days. Tunis is due to host the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) between 16 and 18 November, and other human rights defenders, journalists and civil society activists attending the WSIS may be in danger.

On 8 November Mokhtar Trifi, lawyer and president of the Tunisian League for Human Rights (LTDH), was attacked by plain-clothed men believed to be security officers. He was hit on the head, thrown to the ground and kicked by his assailants. No investigation is known to have been carried out into the attack.

On 11 November, French national Christophe Boltanski, a journalist for the daily newspaper *Libération*, was sprayed with pepper spray, beaten, stabbed in the back, and robbed of his files by assailants in central Tunis, close to a number of foreign embassies. Although the journalist reportedly shouted for help, none of the security officers guarding the nearby embassies came to his rescue. The attack occurred on the same day *Libération* published a report by Christophe Boltanski in which he criticized the recent attacks on Tunisian human rights defenders, including the one on Mokhtar Trifi. The Tunisian authorities have released a statement saying that the attack on Christophe Boltanski is being investigated. There are widespread allegations that the attack may have been carried out by, or with the collusion of, Tunisian security officers.

On 14 November, dozens of plainclothes police officers surrounded the Goethe Institute, a German cultural centre in Tunis, to prevent Tunisian and international civil society organizations meeting to prepare a parallel event to the WSIS, the Citizens' Summit on the Information Society. The officers denied access to the building to several Tunisian human rights defenders and international observers, and in some cases forcibly prevented them from entering. According to an eyewitness, dozens of plainclothes policemen surrounded the car of Tunisian human rights defender Radhia Nasraoui when she arrived at the Goethe Institute with two Belgian journalists, one of whom was filming out of the car window. The policemen allegedly intimidated Radhia Nasraoui by beating their hands on the outside of her car and shouting abuse at her, before reaching through the window to seize the Belgian journalist's camera. The camera was later returned, without the tape on which the earlier material had been recorded.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2001, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), an agency of the UN, selected Tunisia to host the second and concluding part of the WSIS in 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 LTDH is one of only three independent Tunisian human rights organizations accredited to attend the WSIS. In September, a court prevented the LTDH from holding its sixth national congress, following a complaint against the LTDH's Executive Committee filed by the a number of people claiming to be members

of the LTDH, who are reportedly close to the authorities. They allege that they were unfairly dismissed by the LTDH's Executive Committee in the course of the organization's restructuring and the merging of some of its branches. The Tunisian authorities also prevented the Union of Tunisian Journalists (SJT) from holding its first congress and a planned seminar on 7 September. The event was supposed to host hundreds of independent Tunisian journalists as well as representatives of international and regional journalists' organizations. Since the SJT's creation in May 2004, its president, Lotfi Hajji, has been summoned several times to the security department of the Ministry of the Interior for interrogation about the organization's activities. The SJT aims to defend the rights of journalist and promote freedom of the press.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of human rights defenders attending civil society activities organized in conjunction with the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), and for foreign journalists reporting on these activities;
- urging the authorities to conduct full, impartial and independent investigations into recent attacks on Tunisian human rights defenders and individual journalists, including French journalist Christophe Boltanski and LTDH president Mokhtar Trifi, to make the results public and to bring those found responsible to justice;
- calling on the authorities to take action to guarantee the safety of all human rights defenders, civil society activists, journalists and international observers attending the WSIS;
- calling on the authorities to stop the intimidation of Tunisian human rights defenders, and urging them to recognize the legitimacy of their work and their right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as laid out in international law.

APPEALS TO:

President

Président Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Président de la République
Palais Présidentiel, Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 744 721 / 731 009

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

M Rafik Belhaj Kacem
Ministère de l'Intérieur et du Développement Local
Avenue Habib Bourguiba, Tunis, Tunisia

Fax: + 216 71 340 888

E-mail: mint@ministeres.tn

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Official human rights body, reporting to the President

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

Fax: + 216 71 796 593 / 784038

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 27 December 2005.