

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 30/23/96

UA 208/96 Fear of torture or ill-treatment / Probable
prisoners of conscience / Fear of arrest as POC 22 August 1996

TUNISIAMohamed Tahar BARHOUMI, student
Lotfi HAMMAMI, student
Bourhan GASMI
Tahar Gargoura
Abdel Moumen Belanes

Mohamed Tahar Barhoumi, Lotfi Hammami and Bourhan Gasmi, arrested in recent days, are being held incommunicado in secret detention and there are fears that they may be facing torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International is also concerned that they may be prisoners of conscience, and that two other men, whose homes have recently been visited by the security forces, may be in danger of arrest and detention as prisoners of conscience.

Mohamed Tahar Barhoumi was arrested on 14 or 15 August and Lotfi Hammami was arrested during the night of 17 August from his home. Both are second year students in philosophy at Tunis University; Lotfi Hammami was previously detained and tortured in 1991. Bourhan Gasmi is reported to have been arrested during the night of 17 August in Tunis; he was previously imprisoned as a prisoner of conscience in 1987, and was subsequently sentenced *in absentia* in 1992 to two years and two months imprisonment for supporting an unauthorized left-wing political group, the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party (*Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens*), PCOT. He had been in hiding since then.

During the nights of 17 and 18 August 1996 members of the security forces went to the homes of Tahar Gargoura and Abdel Moumen Belanes and it is feared that they are also at risk of arrest. Both have been detained before as prisoners of conscience: Tahar Gargoura in November 1994 and Abdel Moumen Belanes in November 1995, when he was badly tortured in the Ministry of the Interior (see UA 271/95, MDE 30/30/95, 8 December 1995 and follow-ups on 11 January, 9 April, and 23 April 1996).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Arrests of individuals known or suspected of supporting or sympathizing with unauthorized political opposition groups, or of being critical of the government, continue to be widespread in Tunisia. Detainees are routinely subjected to torture and ill-treatment, especially in the days following arrest when they are held incommunicado in secret detention, often in the Ministry of the Interior itself. Complaints of torture and ill-treatment are systematically ignored: in the past six years not a single case of torture or ill-treatment has been adequately investigated and none of those responsible are known to have been brought to justice. The vast majority of those detained are prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence.

Amnesty International has continued to document and condemn such human rights violations in Tunisia, and to call on the Tunisian authorities to take concrete steps to put an end to such practices. However, despite the Tunisian Government's rhetoric about its commitment to respecting human rights, no concrete action has been taken to address these concerns.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of Mohamed Tahar Barhoumi, Lotfi Hammami and Bourhan Gasmi, and asking where they are being held;
- urging that they be allowed immediate access to their families and lawyers and to medical examination and medical care if necessary;
- seeking assurances that they are not being tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for their immediate and unconditional release if they are detained as prisoners of conscience;
- noting that members of the security forces have visited the homes of Tahar Gargoura and Abdel Moumen Belanes, and seeking assurances that the two men will not be detained as prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of Justice

M. Sadok Chaâbane
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
Boulevard Bab Benat
Tunis
Tunisia

Faxes: +216 1 568 106

Telexes: 13000 maet tn (via Ministère de l'Intérieur)

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice Chaâbane, Tunis, Tunisie

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

2) Minister of the Interior

M. Mohamed Jegham
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Av. Habib Bourguiba
Tunis
Tunisia

Faxes: +216 1 340888

telexes: 13662 sdap tn

Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur, Tunis, Tunisia

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Tunisian Human Rights League

Me Taoufik Bouderbala, Président

Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH

21 Rue Imam el Bakri
1002 TUNIS Belvedere
Tunisia

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 30 September 1996.