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## **Tunisia: Release FEMEN activist held on politically motivated charges**

Today's decision by a Tunisian court to dismiss a defamation case against the 18-year-old FEMEN activist Amina Sboui is only a partial victory, Amnesty International said as it called for her release.

Amina was arrested on 19 May after writing the word "Femen" – the name of an international network of feminist activists famous for staging topless protests – on a cemetery wall in Kairouan in central Tunisia. Held since then, she has faced an array of charges including defamation, insulting a civil servant and desecrating a cemetery.

"Imprisoning anyone for expressing themselves is inherently disproportionate. The fact that Amina has already spent two months in prison is an indictment of the state of free expression in Tunisia," said Philip Luther, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

"We believe the case against her constitutes a politically motivated attack on her right to freedom of expression and that she should be released."

Two weeks after her arrest, on 30 May, Amina was fined after being convicted of possessing a can of pepper spray. But she remained in custody on additional charges including "desecrating a cemetery", "belonging to a criminal organization" and "undermining public morals".

Two of these charges were dropped earlier this month, but Amina still faces a prison sentence of up to two years if she is convicted on the remaining charge of "desecrating a cemetery". The prosecution has also sought to reinstate the dropped charges, with an appeals court due to decide on the matter on 1 August.

"The Tunisian authorities have resorted to blatant intimidation tactics against Amina. By keeping her in custody, they are seeking to make an example of her case to deter others from speaking out or criticizing the authorities," Philip Luther said.

On 10 July, Amina's lawyers learnt that new charges were brought against her – including defamation and "insulting a civil servant exercising his duties", which was also dropped today. The prosecution may appeal the decision.

The fresh charges arose after four prison guards claimed Amina insulted them when she intervened on behalf of another detainee.

"No one should be detained for criticizing public officials or for expressing their views, even if others may find them offensive, 'indecent' or 'harmful to public morals'," said Philip Luther.

Amina Sboui, who is also known as Amina Tyler, shot to fame in March 2013 after she posted a topless

photograph of herself on her Facebook page.