

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 23/02/99Error! Bookmark not defined.

16 February 1999

Further information on EXTRA 15/99 (AFR 23/01/99, 8 February 1999) - Prisoner of Conscience

DJIBOUTI Aref Mohamed Aref, human rights defender and lawyer

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Aref Mohamed Aref, a human rights defender and lawyer. On 15 February, Aref Mohamed Aref was sentenced to a term of six months in prison after being found guilty of politically motivated charges. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained for his work as a human rights defender and for expressing critical views on the government of Djibouti.

Although they allowed him to have a defence lawyer during his trial, the authorities denied visas allowing entry to Djibouti to lawyers from international organizations wishing to defend Aref Mohamed Aref. The trial lasted less than six hours. In addition to six months' imprisonment, a two-year suspended sentence was imposed. It is feared that, once released, the authorities will use this suspended sentence to restrict his human rights activities. Aref Mohamed Aref is subjected to harsh conditions of imprisonment in the Gabode prison in Djibouti, the capital city.

A period of ten days has been granted in which to file an appeal.

GENERAL INFORMATION

On 5 December 1998, Djibouti security forces prevented Aref Mohamed Aref from boarding a plane bound for Paris to attend a Human Rights Defenders Summit organized by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations. They confiscated his passport, without explaining the reason, and have not yet returned it. In November 1998, Aref Mohamed Aref had attended an African Human Rights Defenders conference organized by Amnesty International in South Africa. He is a member of a network of human rights defenders in Africa and is the leading human rights lawyer in Djibouti.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Aref Mohamed Aref, whom Amnesty International considers to be a prisoner of conscience, detained for his work as a defender of human rights and for expressing critical views on the government
- urging that he be allowed to communicate with his family and lawyers while he remains in prison
- expressing concern about the harsh conditions of the Gabode prison and urging that he be given the medical assistance he needs
- urging the authorities to ensure that any appeal procedure against the six-month prison term and the two-year suspended prison sentence imposed on Aref Mohamed Aref is consistent with international standards of fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

(Please note that fax tones may be difficult to obtain)

Son Excellence Monsieur Hassan Gouled Aptidon
Président de la République
La Présidence
BP 6
Djibouti

République de Djibouti

Telegrams: Président, Djibouti, Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 350174

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President

Monsieur Mohamed Dini Farah
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 12
Djibouti

République de Djibouti

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Djibouti, Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 355420

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Monsieur Ismail Omar Guelle
Chef du Service de documentation et de sécurité (SDS)
La Présidence
BP 6
Djibouti

République de Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 350174

Monsieur Mohamed Moussa Chehem
Ministre des affaires étrangères
Ministère des affaires étrangères
BP 1863
Djibouti

République de Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 353840

and to diplomatic representatives of Djibouti accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the International Secretariat or
The Office of its Section if they are to send them after 16 March 1999.