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@Long-term "disappearances" of trade unionists

APRIL 1992

AI INDEX: MDE 29/01/92

DISTR: SC/CO/GR

Since the 1960s the Moroccan Government has used "disappearance" as a form of punishment against its political opponents: these have included hundreds of people of Western Saharan origin who "disappeared" after 1975 and over one hundred Moroccans who have "disappeared" between 1963 and 1985. Many may still be alive in secret detention. In once such secret detention centre Tazmamert, (said by the Moroccan Government to have been demolished in September 1991), half the detainees are said to have died after years of isolation, lack of medication, insufficient food and clothing.

This paper is about two Moroccan prisoners of conscience and trade union activists. Abdelhaq Rouissi "disappeared" in 1964 and Houcine Ben Ali El-Manouzi "disappeared" in 1972. These men may still be alive and detained in secret centres.

Abdelhaq Rouissi, a former employee of the *Banque du Maroc* in Casablanca is an activist in the *Union marocaine du travail* (UMT), Moroccan Labour Union. He had called for a boycott of the legislative elections of 1962 which called for the formation of a representative government under a strong monarchy and was opposed to the 1963 border conflict with Algeria. He "disappeared" on 4 October 1964; there are no known witnesses to his arrest, but traces of blood were found in his bedroom.

Recent information from former "disappearance" victims has confirmed that Abdelhaq Rouissi was arrested and subsequently held for years in secret detention. He was seen in a secret centre of the gendarmerie in Rabat by another former "disappeared" detainee in

1975. Later he was reported to be in the military camp of Ahermoumou and was said to be still alive in secret detention in 1983. His family has tried continuously to ascertain information on his whereabouts, but without success. Amnesty International believes he is being held solely for his non-violent political and trade unionist activities.

Houcine El-Manouzi is a 49-year-old trade union activist in the *Union marocaine du travail* and is a member of a family from Tafraout with a history of political opposition to the government. In 1963 he was dismissed from Royal Air Maroc (RAM), where he was working as an airline mechanic, allegedly because of his trade union activities. He was also an active member of the *Union Nationale des Forces Populaires*, National Union of Popular Forces. After his dismissal he emigrated to Belgium, where he worked as an airline mechanic and continued his trade union activities. He was sentenced to death in absentia in 1971 in a major political trial in Marrakech after being convicted on charges of plotting against the internal security of the state. Amnesty International observers concluded that there were serious violations of the defendants' rights before and during the trial, and that majority of the accused could not be associated with the crimes for which they were tried.

The following year, while on a trip to Tunis, Houcine El-Manouzi "disappeared". For three years nothing was heard of him. Family and friends believed he had been kidnapped by Moroccan agents and returned to Morocco. This belief was confirmed when suddenly, in July 1975, his picture appeared on "wanted" posters displayed in Moroccan police stations and police raided the houses of his relatives. It seemed that Houcine El-Manouzi had briefly escaped but was later recaptured.

It is only recently that testimonies from the Bourequat brothers who were held with Houcine El-Manouzi for a year, and other former "disappeared" detainees have revealed more of the story of El-Manouzi's "disappearance". According to this information, Houcine El-Manouzi was kidnapped from the house of a friend in Tunis, tied and chloroformed, bundled into a boot of a Mercedes car with diplomatic number plates and taken to Rabat. He was held at first at a villa in Souissi, where he was interrogated and later taken to Dar al-Mokri in Rabat, one of the many unofficial places of detention where prisoners were said to be held incommunicado and often tortured. Among those detained with Houcine El-Manouzi between 1974-1975 in *Poste Fixe III* (PFIII) were the Bourequat brothers - Midhat, Bayazid and Ali Bourequat - and four officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Mohamed Ababou, Captain Chellat, Officer cadet Ahmed Mzirek and Warrant Officer Harouch Akka. The officers had been involved in an attempted coup against King Hassan II during his birthday party at the Skhirat palace in July 1971. In 1975 the eight "disappeared" detainees escaped. Houcine El-Manouzi apparently separated from the others but was recaptured about five days later 28 kilometres from Rabat. Since 1975 Amnesty International has sought news of him from Moroccan prisons and government authorities, but without success. Amnesty International believes he is being held solely for his non-violent political and trade unionist activities.

Recently, Amnesty International has welcomed some of the positive steps taken by the Moroccan Government. A number of people who had "disappeared", some for up to 18 years, were released. They included over 260 people of Western Saharan origin. In

September 1991 the notorious secret detention centre of Tazmamert where conditions were extremely harsh, was said to have been demolished by the Moroccan Government. On 30 December 1991 the Bourequat brothers who "disappeared" for over 18 years were released. Though over 700 political prisoners remain detained there have been amnesties for over 40 political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience detained since the 1970s.

Amnesty International, however, remains extremely concerned about the fate of Abdelhaq Rouissi and Houcine El-Manouzi who have been kept isolated from the outside world since their "disappearance" in 1964 and 1972. The organization calls on the Moroccan Government to immediately and unconditionally release these prisoners of conscience and bring to justice those responsible for their prolonged "disappearance".

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