

UA 71/99

Health concern for students on hunger strike / Prisoners

TUNISIA Qais Ouisslati Ali Jallouli
Lotfi Hammami Jalal Bouraoui
Rachid Trabelsi Ridha Ouisslati
Najib Baccouchi Habib Hasni
Noureddine Benticha Chedli Hammami
Taha Sassi Haikal Mannal
Bourham Gasmi

Amnesty International is concerned for the health of ten of the above-named students who went on hunger strike 16 days ago to protest at their continued detention. Amnesty is also concerned for three others arrested in connection with their case as prison conditions are extremely harsh and overcrowded.

The students, who were arrested between February and April 1998, are asking to be released immediately and unconditionally, for charges against them be lifted and for their allegations of torture and unfair legal proceedings to be investigated by an independent commission, and have sent these demands to the examining magistrate.

Habib Hasni and Bourham Gasmi (who was briefly hospitalized with a stomach ulcer) ended their hunger strike on 2 April 1999. Ali Jallouli, Rachid Trabelsi, Chedli Hammami, Haikal Mannal, Qais Ouisslati, Ridha Ouisslati, Noureddine Benticha and Jalal Bouraoui, however, are all still on hunger strike. Chedli Hammami is reportedly suffering from severe arm and shoulder pain as a result of torture in incommunicado detention last year.

On 5 April 1999, the examining magistrate closed the pre-trial investigation into the case. He concluded that the charges against them are misdemeanours (which carry up to five years' imprisonment and are tried before the Court of First Instance, where there is a possibility of appeal) and not crimes (which carry more than five years' imprisonment, are tried before the criminal chamber of the Appeal court and where there is no possibility of appeal). The maximum period for pre-trial detention for offences is nine months. The students have now been in pre-trial detention for 13 to 14 months.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Students involved in student union activities often face repeated arrest and torture in detention. The students were arrested in connection with student strikes calling for improvements in student conditions which took place in Tunis and other cities in February 1998. Most of them have reportedly been ill-treated during periods of incommunicado detention and Lotfi Hammami was seriously tortured during secret detention. They are charged with "belonging to a criminal and terrorist gang, holding unauthorized meetings, inciting rebellion, spreading false information aiming to disturb public order, defamation against the authorities and distributing leaflets". They have been on several hunger strikes while in detention to protest at their treatment.

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

- expressing concern about the health of the ten detainees named above and seeking assurances that they be given any necessary medical care;

- urging that all detained students be immediately and unconditionally released as prisoners of conscience.

APPEALS TO:

Note: If a voice answers a fax number please say: "je voudrais envoyer un fax, s'il vous plaît".

Minister of Justice

M. Abdallah Kallel
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis, Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 568 106

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

Minister of the Interior

M. Ali Chaouch
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
1001 Tunis , Tunisie

Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 340 888

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Tunisian Human Rights League

Me Taoufik Bouderbala,
Président Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme
LTDH
7 Rue Pierre Curie, Tunis, Tunisia

Faxes: + 216 1 336 338

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 21 May 1999.