

PUBLIC

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Health concern

26 September 2000

TUNISIA

Fathi Karraoud  
Abdellatif Bouhajila  
Yassine Ben Zarti  
Ahmed Amari  
Zuhair Yacoub  
Abdallah Drissa  
Noureddine Amdouni  
At least ten others

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There is serious concern for the health of prisoners in Tunisia currently on hunger strike, several of who have been on hunger strike repeatedly in recent months. Prison conditions are extremely poor and prisoners do not have access to medical care.

Abdellatif Bouhajila, Zuhair Yacoub and Ahmed Amari are protesting against the length of the judicial proceedings against them. They were returned to Tunisia by the Libyan authorities in 1996 and 1997 and are being prosecuted on charges of having links with *al-Nahda*, an unauthorized Islamist group. Abdellatif Bouhajila has been on hunger strike since 28 August. On 11 September two policemen had to support him in court, as he could not walk. Zuhair Yacoub and Ahmed Amari have been on hunger strike for several weeks, and on 19 September, Zuhair Yacoub said in court he was determined to carry that on. Another of Abdellatif Bouhajila's co-defendants, Ben Zarti, has been on hunger strike since 5 September.

Fathi Karraoud has been on hunger strike since 3 September, also in protest against the length of the judicial proceedings against him. He was initially arrested in July 1999 on his return from studying in Senegal and was tortured while held in incommunicado detention at the Ministry of the Interior. He is charged with having links with *al-Nahda*.

Other prisoners who have already been sentenced are asking to be released and are protesting at detention conditions. Among those are Noureddine Amdouni and Abdallah Drissa, who have been on hunger strike since 4 September. Amdouni complained last week that conditions of detention have worsened during his hunger strike. Abdallah Drissa is serving a 17-year prison sentence and Noureddine Amdouni a life-sentence. Both were tried in unfair trials.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There are up to 1000 political prisoners in Tunisia, most of them prisoners of conscience, imprisoned because of their known or suspected links with unauthorized Islamist political groups. The vast majority of these prisoners have been sentenced after unfair trials and several have been tried and sentenced more than once on similar charges.

Prison conditions in Tunisia fall short of minimum adequate standards. Hygiene is extremely poor, and prisoners rarely have access to showers and washing facilities. Cells are overcrowded, with most prisoners forced to share beds or sleep on the floor. Contagious diseases, particularly scabies, are widespread, and prisoners do not have access to adequate medical care.

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

- expressing concern about the health of prisoners on hunger strike;
- seeking assurances that they are given any necessary medical care.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

Minister of the Interior  
M. Abdallah KALLEL  
Ministre de l'Intérieur

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Ministère de l'Intérieur  
Avenue Habib Bourguiba  
1001 Tunis, Tunisia

**Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Tunis, Tunisia**

**Faxes: + 216 1 340 888**

**e-mail: mint@ministeres.tn**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

Presidential Councillor for Human Rights

M. Dali JAZI

Conseiller Spécial auprès du Président de la République,  
chargé des droits de l'homme

Palais Présidentiel

Tunis

Tunisia

**Faxes: + 216 1 571314**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Conseiller / Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

M. Afif Hendaoui

Ministre Délégué chargé des Droits de l'Homme

Bureau du Premier Ministre

Place du Gouvernement

La Kasbah

1006 Tunis

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 7 November 2000.