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TUNISIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE RELEASE OF MOHAMED NAJIB HOSNI AND MOHAMED HEDI SASSI

Amnesty International welcomes the recent release of two prisoners of conscience, Mohamed Najib Hosni and Mohamed Hedi Sassi, but is concerned that the charges against them have not been dropped.

Mohamed Najib Hosni, lawyer and human rights defender, and Mohamed Hedi Sassi, a member of the illegal *Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens*, PCOT (Tunisian Workers' Communist Party) were released conditionally by the Tunisian authorities on 14 December.

"These men were imprisoned solely for their beliefs and should be released unconditionally," Amnesty International said today. "We will continue to call on the Tunisian authorities to drop the charges against them."

Mohamed Najib Hosni, arrested in June 1994, had been kept in pre-trial detention for 18 months during which he was tortured for three days in November 1995 at the Ministry of the Interior. In January 1996, despite any convincing evidence, he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment and suspended from practising law for seven years on charges of "forgery". On 14 November, in a second case brought against him whilst in detention, he was acquitted of the charges of "conspiracy" and "terrorism" for lack of proof.

During over two years in prison, Mohamed Najib Hosni has been awarded a number of human rights prizes including a human rights award from the American Bar Association and an honorary law degree from a US university.

Mohamed Hedi Sassi, arrested in April 1994, was serving a total sentence of three years and four months' imprisonment for supporting the PCOT, insulting public order, distributing leaflets and writing a verse of the Tunisian poet Abu Al-Kacem Chabbi's poem, "*The chains must be broken*" on a wall. He had been beaten and tortured in detention before and after his trial.

International human rights organizations had been campaigning for the releases of both Mohamed Najib Hosni and Mohamed Hedi Sassi.

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