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## **Tunisia: Licence to “shoot on sight” must be rescinded**

Amnesty International is today calling on the Tunisian authorities to rescind permissions to "shoot on sight", after a wave of protests led to the reported departure from the country of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and a state of emergency imposed.

Amnesty International's investigative team in Tunisia has reported media broadcasts warning that gatherings of more than three people will not be tolerated, and that anyone breaking the curfew exposes themselves to the risk of being shot. After the announcement, the team reported hearing shots.

“It is simply irresponsible to grant the power to ‘shoot on sight’,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme, “It is not by continuing to shoot demonstrators that public order will be restored. The bloody crackdown must end.”

This power appears to grant official sanction to the Tunisian security forces to commit extrajudicial executions – in violation of Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees the right to life and prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life.

"The Tunisian authorities have a responsibility to preserve law and order and to protect the rights and safety of its population," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"However, human rights must be upheld even in situations of emergency. Any action by the state, including invoking emergency powers, must be in full conformity with international human rights standards."

“Such licence given to the army and security forces, in a very volatile situation, could be a recipe for further violence and killings,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui. “Both the police and army should know that they can’t hide behind orders to shoot at protestors, and that they will be held accountable for their actions.”

Under Article 4 of the ICCPR, Tunisia may not under any circumstances suspend basic rights notably the right to life, the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, as well as fundamental principles of fair trial and freedom from arbitrary detention. Certain other rights may be limited, “in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation,” but only "to the extent strictly required" and as long as this does not conflict with the nation's other international obligations, and if the government immediately informs the UN Secretary General about what rights have been suspended and why.

“After more than two decades of ruthless repression, Tunisian authorities must now realize that the time for accountability has come,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui. “The licence to ‘shoot on sight’ must be rescinded and, if Tunisia is to move forward reform of the security apparatus must be a priority.”