

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Prisoners of conscience / Medical concern 20 January 1995

TUNISIA	Tahar GARGOURA)	
	Ridha ERRASAS)	students
	Zine ESSAID)	

On 18 January 1995, the Sousse Court of First Instance sentenced Tahar Gargoura, Ridha Errasas, Zine Essaid, members of the executive and federal bureau of the *Union Général des Etudiants Tunisiens*, UGET (Tunisian Students' General Union), to six months' imprisonment on charges of belonging to an unauthorized association, the *Parti Communiste des Ouvriers Tunisiens*, PCOT (Tunisian workers' communist party). Their appeal is due to take place shortly.

Tahar Gargoura suffers from tuberculosis, and has been unable to obtain specialist medical examination since his arrest on 2 November 1994. Ridha Errasas caught a skin disease in the police station where he was initially detained after arrest and has not received adequate medical treatment until now. The unhygienic conditions of detention have not helped to improve their health condition. They are currently being held in Sousse Prison.

Amnesty International considers the three to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for their suspected association with an illegal political party which does not use or advocate violence. They should be immediately and unconditionally released.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Tahar Gargoura, Ridha Errasas and Zine Essaid were arrested in Sousse University on 2 November 1994. They had gone to speak to the Director of the university campus, in their capacity as members of the executive and federal bureau of the UGET, about the problem of some other students accused of having taken part in disturbances reported to have occurred in previous days.

Over the last few months the human rights situation in Tunisia has continued to deteriorate. The same repressive measures initially used by the Tunisian authorities against known or suspected Islamist opponents are now widely used against known or suspected government critics and political opponents across the political spectrum. Scores of prisoners of conscience have been imprisoned over the past two years on charges of belonging to the banned PCOT; its spokesman is currently serving a prison sentence of eight years and seven months imposed in 1994. Most of those released from prison are forced to sign daily at the police station, and others who have not been detained have had their passport confiscated on the grounds that they "criticize Tunisia abroad". Major French newspapers, the most read foreign media in Tunisia, have been banned from the country for almost a year. The Tunisian authorities have denied permission to international human rights organizations to visit prisoners and continue to refuse to provide details on the trials which have resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of prisoners of conscience.

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

- expressing concern at the imprisonment as prisoners of conscience of Tahar Gargoura, Ridha Errasas and Zine Essaid, currently held in Sousse Prison, and calling on the Tunisian authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally;

- expressing concern at the lack of adequate medical care provided to Tahar Gargoura and Ridha Errasas, and urging them to be given access to a doctor of their choice.

Please bring this action to the attention of student networks

APPEALS TO

1) Minister of Justice

M. Sadok Chaâbane
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
Boulevard Bab Benat
Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: +216 1 568 106 or +216 1 567 070

Telexes: 13000 maet tn (via Ministère de l'Intérieur)

Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice Chaâbane, Tunis, Tunisie

Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency

2) Minister of Foreign Affairs

M. Habib Ben Yahia
Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
Place du Gouvernement, La Kasbah
Tunis
Tunisie

Faxes : +216 1 791005

Telexes: 14470 mafta tn 14471 mafta tn 14472 mafta tn

Telegrams: Ministre des Affaires étrangères Ben Yahia, Tunis, Tunisia

Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

M. Salem Makki

Conseiller Présidentiel chargé des droits de l'homme

Palais Présidentiel
Carthage/Tunis
Tunisia

Faxes: +216 1 731 009 or +216 1 742 513

The Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH

21 Rue Imam el Bakri
1002 TUNIS Belvedere
Tunisia

Faxes: +216 1 801599

The Union Général des Etudiants Tunisiens, UGET

19 Rue de Palestine
1002 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 10 March 1995.