

URGENT ACTION

INCREASED TORTURE RISK FOR TUNISIAN PRISONER

Ramzi Romdhani, who is serving a 29-year prison sentence, has been denied family visits since 18 November 2010 as a disciplinary measure. He has repeatedly reported being tortured and otherwise ill-treated while in detention, and is believed to now be at heightened risk of abuse.

When **Ramzi Romdhani's** family last saw him in Mornaguia Prison in November, he told them that he had been tortured and severely beaten on his ear and that he had been taken to hospital for treatment. When Ramzi Romdhani's family tried to visit him the following week, on 25 November, they were told that he had been transferred to Messaidine Prison in Sousse – around 150 kilometres from Tunis, where his family live. One of Ramzi Romdhani's relatives travelled to visit him the following day, but was informed that Ramzi Romdhani was subject to disciplinary measures which prevent him from receiving family visits.

They prison authorities have continued to prevent Ramzi Romdhani's family from seeing him. Every time they visit the prison, they are told to leave as he is still being disciplined. His family last tried to visit him on 5 January. The Messaidine prison authorities have also refused to take the food and clothes that Ramzi Romdhani's family have brought for him. The continued prohibition on visiting Ramzi Romdhani is in breach of the Tunisian law on prisons, which states that such a ban may not last more than 15 days (Law No. 2001-52, Article 22). Continued denial of family visits sparks fears that he is at an increased risk of torture or other ill-treatment in prison.

Ramzi Romdhani's family have written letters to the Tunisian authorities, including the Minister of Justice, the Sousse Public Prosecutor and the Prison Director, asking them to be allowed to visit him but have had no answer.

Ramzi Romdhani was arrested in April 2007 and is now serving a sentence totalling 29 years in prison, imposed under anti-terrorism legislation in nine separate cases. He has previously alleged that he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated on at least three occasions: in April 2009, August 2009 and December 2009 (see original UA and follow-ups), but to date the Tunisian authorities have failed to conduct an independent investigation, as required under international law.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, French or your own language:

- Expressing concern that Ramzi Romdhani has been denied family visits since 18 November 2010, in violation of Tunisian law;
- Asking the reasons for this, and urging that he be permitted to receive regular family visits without delay;
- Calling on the Tunisian authorities to treat him humanely, and not torture or otherwise ill-treat him;
- Calling for an urgent thorough, independent and impartial investigation into allegations that Ramzi Romdhani has been tortured, and for any officials found responsible to be brought to justice;
- Demanding that they ensure Ramzi Romdhani has access to the medical care he needs.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 FEBRUARY 2011 TO:

Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Lazhar Bououni

Ministry of Justice and Human Rights

31 Boulevard Bab Benat

1006 Tunis – La Kasbah

Fax: + 216 71 568 106

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Rafik Belhaj Kacem

Ministry of Interior and Local

Development

Avenue Habib Bourguiba

1000 Tunis

Fax: +216 71 340 888

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Directeur général des prisons et de la
rééducation

Rue 8003 – Appartement L

Espace de Tunis

Monplaisir, Tunis

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 130/09 (MDE 30/004/2009). Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE30/004/2009/en> and <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE30/001/2010/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 31 December 2009, Ramzi Romdhani told his brother that he was tortured on 24 and 25 December after he had been transferred to the Department of State Security (DSS) of the Ministry of Interior in the Tunisian capital, Tunis, from Mornaguia Prison. He said he was tortured for two days and interrogated in connection with other cases. He told his brother that he was beaten, had his nails and fingers burned and that his head was plunged repeatedly in hot water for about 30 minutes. He said he was beaten on his eyes and sustained serious eye injuries. During the visit, his brother was able to observe several bruises on his body and burn marks on his fingers.

In April 2009, Ramzi Romdhani is reported to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated by officers at Mornaguia Prison, by guards who beat him with sticks, kicked him while wearing military boots, inflicted cigarette burns on his body, and plunged his head repeatedly into a bucket of water causing him to fear drowning and eventually to lose consciousness.

In August 2009, he alleges that he was beaten by prison guards and then taken to the DSS, where he was tortured, including with electric shocks, suspension and simulation of hanging.

In December 2009, the prison doctor at Mornaguia told Ramzi Romdhani that he required surgery to safeguard his sight but it is not known whether this has been provided. He is reported to have sustained serious eye injuries while detained for interrogation by officials of the Department of State Security of the Ministry of Interior in Tunis.

His brother was arrested on 18 January 2010 at his home by eight DSS officers and detained incommunicado until 20 January, when he was released uncharged. His arrest is believed to have been linked to his efforts to expose and publicize the torture and other ill-treatment of Ramzi Romdhani, including his contacts with human rights lawyers and local and international human rights organizations.

Amnesty International has received numerous reports of torture and other ill-treatment by the Tunisian security forces. In virtually all cases, allegations of torture are not investigated and the perpetrators are not brought to justice. Individuals are most at risk of torture when held incommunicado. The most commonly reported methods of torture are beatings on the body, especially the soles of the feet; suspension by the ankles or in contorted positions; electric shocks; and burning with cigarettes. There are also reports of mock executions, sexual abuse, including rape with bottles and sticks, and threats of sexual abuse of female relatives.

Tunisia is a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Tunisian authorities are under an obligation to prevent torture and to "ensure that its competent authorities proceed to a prompt and impartial investigation, wherever there is reasonable ground to believe that an act of torture has been committed in any territory under its jurisdiction."

Tunisia's anti-terrorism legislation has been repeatedly criticized by UN human rights bodies and local and international human rights organizations as overly general and broad, and could be used as a repressive measure to curtail legitimate dissent. Similar concerns were reiterated by the United Nations Human Rights Committee in March 2008 in its concluding observations regarding Tunisia and by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism following his visit to Tunisia in January 2010.

Further information on UA: 130/09 Index: MDE 30/001/2011 Issue Date: 7 January 2011

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