

# URGENT ACTION

## JAILED JOURNALIST MUST GET MEDICAL TREATMENT

**Tunisian Journalist Taoufik Ben Brik, in jail on politically motivated charges, is in urgent need of specialist medical care, without which his life may be in danger. A prominent critic of the Tunisian government, he was sentenced on 26 November 2009 to six months' imprisonment, after an unfair trial. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience.**

Taoufik Ben Brik suffers from diabetes, chronic diarrhoea and the hormonal disorder Cushing's Syndrome, for which he needs regular medication and proper medical monitoring. He has to take medication daily, and follow a special diet. According to his wife, who visited him for 10 minutes on 16 December, his body was swollen and his skin was bluish, possible consequences of Cushing's Syndrome. He found standing up difficult and spoke little. She found that he was very weak, even though he is taking his medication and the family are able to bring him the food he needs three times a week. However he was not able to see a doctor specialized in his condition.

On 9 December, his wife was not allowed to visit him, but his sister and brother were, and they said that he had influenza symptoms and was already unwell. He had seen a doctor in prison, but said this doctor could not help him, as he needed to see a specialist. His wife said that even at home his health was unstable: he often needed to rest all day, and visited specialists regularly.

He was first held at Mornaguia Prison, near the capital, Tunis, where his family live. His lawyers were often prevented from visiting him in prison. Neither they nor his family had any news about him at all from 19 to 29 November 2009, after which they were told that he had been moved to Siliana Prison, around 125 km south-west of Tunis. He began a hunger strike in protest, which he stopped after eight days after his family visited him. The prison is cold and dirty, and his wife says this is affecting his health: he was cold when she saw him on 16 December, and wearing a woollen hat and three sweaters.

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

- Urging the Tunisian authorities to release Taoufik Ben Brik immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience held solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that in line with Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners Taoufik Ben Brik is immediately provided with the specialist medical care he requires, outside prison if necessary;
- Calling on them to ensure that the prison authorities allow Taoufik Ben Brik the diet he requires, and give him meaningful access to his lawyers and family.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 JANUARY 2010 TO:

#### President

Zine El Abidine Ben Ali

President

Palais Présidentiel

Tunis, Tunisia

**Fax: +216 71 744 721**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Minister of Justice and Human Rights

Béchir Tekkari

Ministry of Justice and Human Rights

31 boulevard Bab Benat

Tunis 1019, Tunisia

**Fax: +216 71 568 106**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### **And copies to:**

Directeur général des prisons

Rue 8003, Appartement -L-

Espace de Tunis Monplaisir

Tunisia

**Fax: +216 71 904 472**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. Further information: [www.amnesty.org/en/region/tunisia](http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/tunisia)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

At his 19 November hearing, Taoufik Ben Briik's lawyers were not able to present their arguments fully, or cross-examine witnesses. Taoufik Ben Brik himself was not allowed to finish his statement, and the judge did not respond to the lawyers' demands that experts should examine Taoufik Ben Brik's signature on a statement, as they believe it to be forged. Only four of his lawyers were allowed to present their case to the court, and only on procedural grounds, before the presiding judge decided that he had enough evidence to take a decision. The 19 November hearing took place with the security forces were deployed around the courthouse and inside the courtroom; they prevented a number of journalists and activist observers from reaching the court. Only three members of Taoufik Ben Brik's family were allowed to attend.

Before the presidential and legislative elections of 25 October, Taoufik Ben Brik wrote several articles for French newspapers, including *Le Nouvel Observateur*, criticizing President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's government. Taoufik Ben Brik appears to have been prosecuted on account of his criticism of the government and opposition to the re-election of President Ben Ali.

The Tunisian authorities began clamping down on peaceful critics of the government in the weeks leading up to the elections. Several journalists, human rights and civil society activists have been harassed, assaulted and detained on fabricated charges. The authorities target those who exercise their right to free speech to criticize the government or allege corruption, like Taoufik Ben Brik, for expressing dissent, in gross breach of Tunisia's obligations under international law, including Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Tunisia is a state party.

Cushing's Syndrome is a relatively rare condition caused by prolonged exposure to excess levels of the hormone cortisol.

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