

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Tunisia: Amnesty International protests 'abusive interference'

Amnesty International has protested to the Tunisian government over an incident last weekend when local authorities in Sousse prevented a group of the organization's local members from holding a private meeting to discuss their work for human rights.

In a letter sent today to Tunisian Interior Minister, Mr. Rafik Belhaj Kacem, Amnesty International called for an inquiry into the incident, describing it as an unwarranted and abusive interference with its members' legitimate exercise of their basic human rights. The organization said the prevention of the meeting had no basis in Tunisian law and also breached Tunisia's obligations under international human rights law. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Tunisian government is obliged to uphold human rights, including the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Amnesty International called for the officials responsible to be disciplined.

The organization described the action of the Tunisian authorities as part of a much wider pattern of harassment, abuse and intimidation of human rights activists, which in recent years has seen Tunisian human rights defenders detained without trial or after unfair trials, attacked in the street and assaulted by plain-clothed government security agents and subjected to a wide range of other abuses. Human rights defender Mohamed Abbou has been imprisoned since April 2005 for the peaceful expression of his opinion on the internet and his family face harassment when they visit him. The Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LTDH) has been unable to hold any meetings since April 2006 and was recently prohibited by a court ruling from holding its congress. The National Council for Liberties in Tunisia (CNLT), which has been unable to hold its general meeting since December 2004, is under constant surveillance and its members and journalists meet with harassment when they try to reach its offices.

The banning of the private meeting last weekend was not the first time that Amnesty International Tunisian members have been subjected to abusive action by the authorities. In May 2006, Tunisian police detained the then chairperson of the Amnesty International Tunisia section for several hours soon after arresting and deporting one of the keynote speakers at the section's annual meeting who had publicly criticised the human rights record of President Zine Eddin Ben Ali's government in Tunisia.

For further information :

Human rights abuses in the run up to the WSIS

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE300192005?open&of=ENG-TUN>

Tunisia: A member of the Executive Committee of the Swiss Section of Amnesty International is expelled from Tunisia

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE300132006?open&of=ENG-TUN>

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