

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 30/01/00

UA 06/00

Human rights defender / fear for safety 11 January 2000

TUNISIA

**Sihem Ben Sedrine (f), journalist**  
**Employees of Editions Aloes publishing house**

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Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of journalist Sihem Ben Sedrine. The offices of her publishing house, *Editions Aloes*, have been burgled twice in the past month, and her employees have been threatened by members of the security forces.

On 8 December 1999, the door was smashed and the office was ransacked, but nothing was taken. However, the local police warned Sihem Ben Sedrine that they feared the burglars might return and plant drugs. Sihem Ben Sedrine wrote to the Minister of the Interior, asking for protection and expressing concern about the local police's warning. On 30 December, the office was burgled again. This time, all the computer equipment and some of the archives were stolen.

In late December, members of the security forces, who showed their identification badges, reportedly threatened one of the employees of the publishing house and said she could be tried on trumped-up charges if she refused to cooperate and spy on Sihem Ben Sedrine. On 8 January members of the security forces apparently made similar threats to another employee.

Sihem Ben Sedrine is a founder member of the unauthorized *Conseil national pour les libertés en Tunisie* (CNLT), National Council for Freedoms in Tunisia, and a former leading member of the *Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme*, Tunisian Human Rights League. She has faced harassment and intimidation by the security forces for many years in connection with her human rights work and political activities, and is under constant surveillance. **She is now coming under increased harassment at a time when she is reportedly planning to set up an independent newspaper.** Her husband, CNLT Secretary General Omar Mestiri, is awaiting trial for maintaining an unauthorized organization.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past three years the Tunisian authorities have increasingly targeted human rights defenders because of their activities in defence of human rights and civil liberties. Several have been arrested and many are under surveillance, and they and their relatives are continually followed, harassed and intimidated. Sometimes their offices have been burgled, apparently by members of the security forces. Some human rights defenders and their relatives have been threatened with violence. On 20 May 1999, journalist and CNLT member Taoufik Ben Brik was attacked in broad daylight by three men armed with chains, outside his home in Tunis. In August 1999 16-year-old Nadia Hammami, daughter of human rights lawyer Radhia Nasraoui, was almost run over by a motorbike of the type used by the security forces.

#### RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing concern at the harassment and intimidation of Sihem Ben Sedrine and the employees of *Editions Aloes*, and seeking assurances that their safety will be guaranteed;
- calling on the Tunisian authorities to adhere to the numerous international human rights treaties ratified by Tunisia by taking prompt

and concrete measures to ensure that the harassment, surveillance and intimidation of all human rights defenders and their relatives is stopped;

- urging them to take effective measures to ensure that human rights defenders are protected and allowed to carry out their human rights activities, and to exercise their right to freedom of expression and association without interference, intimidation or persecution.

**APPEALS TO:**

M. Abdallah Kallel  
Ministère de l'Intérieur  
Avenue Habib Bourguiba  
1001 Tunis  
Tunisia

**Telegrams:**

**Fax:** + 216 1 340 888

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Your Excellency**

M. Bechir Takkari  
Ministère de la Justice  
31 Boulevard Bab Benat  
1006 Tunis  
Tunisia

**Telegrams:**

**Fax:** + 216 1 568 106

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

Tunisian Human Rights League

Me Toufik Bouderbala

Président Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme

LTDH

7 Rue Pierre Curie

Tunis

Tunisia

**Faxes:** + 216 1 336 338

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 21 February 2000.