

10 February 2000

UA 32/00

Fear for safety

TUNISIA

Salah Hamzaoui, academic
Other human rights defenders

Salah Hamzaoui, president of the *Comité de soutien à Hamma Hammami*, Committee to Support Hamma Hammami, was attacked in the street in downtown Tunis on 9 February, by a man who knocked him about and ran off with files containing the details of some of the Committee's members, as well as a draft text about the case of Hamma Hammami. Amnesty International fears that the members of the Committee, most of them well-known human rights defenders, may face further harassment and possible arrest.

Hamma Hammami, spokesman of the unauthorised *Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens* (PCOT), Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, has been on the run since February 1998. The *Comité de soutien à Hamma Hammami* was set up in January 2000 by Salah Hamzaoui and 24 other academics and human rights defenders, to publicize the case of Hamma Hammami and put pressure on the Tunisian authorities to close the case and stop harassing Hamma Hammami's relatives.

This attack appears to be linked to the Tunisian security forces' seizure on 23 January of French journalist Daniel Mermet's tapes, notes and address book. Daniel Mermet, who was preparing a radio program on civil liberties in Tunisia, had attended the founding meeting of the *Comité de soutien à Hamma Hammami*.

Several members of the Committee have faced intimidation in recent weeks. Lawyer Anouar Kousri and his relatives are under constant surveillance. Clients who have visited his office have been threatened by members of the security forces in plain clothes and warned not to come back. When former prisoner of conscience Mohamed Hedi Sassi visited him in January, he was arrested and questioned for a day and about his links with Anouar Kousri. On 2 February, journalist Sihem Ben Sedrine, who was trying to set up an independent newspaper, was threatened in the street by a man holding a razor. Sihem Ben Sedrine's publishing house had been ransacked three times in December 1999, a practice used by Tunisian authorities to try to silence their critics (see UA 06/00, MDE 30/01/00, 11 January 2000).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hamma Hammami was sentenced *in absentia* in July 1999 to nine years and three months' imprisonment for his membership of PCOT, a very small Marxist-Leninist organisation. His wife, human rights lawyer Radhia Nasraoui, received a suspended six-month prison term at the same trial. She and their children have been under constant surveillance and harassment since Hamma Hammami went on the run in February 1998.

In recent years, Tunisian authorities have used various methods to silence human rights defenders, ranging from tampering with their communications, harassment, threats and attacks to arrest, torture and imprisonment. Lawyers, human rights activists, journalists and their relatives, as well as organizations such as Amnesty International's Tunisian section, the *Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'Homme* (LTDH), Tunisian League for Human Rights and the unauthorized *Conseil national des libertés en Tunisie*, National Committee for Freedoms in Tunisia, have been targeted.

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

- calling for a prompt investigation into the attacks on Salah Hamzaoui, and for those responsible to be brought to justice;
- urging the authorities 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;
- calling on the Tunisian authorities to adhere to the numerous international human rights treaties they have ratified, by taking prompt and concrete measures to ensure that the harassment, surveillance and intimidation of all human rights defenders and their relatives is stopped.

APPEALS TO:

Président M. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali
Président de la République
Palais Présidentiel
Tunis/Carthage
Tunisie

Telegrams: Président, Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 744 721

Salutation: Monsieur le Président / Dear President

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

Telegrams: Ministre Interieur, Tunis, Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 340 888

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

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 23 March 2000.