

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Tunisia: Predictable prison sentence for human rights activist

Amnesty International has deplored today's conviction of Tunisian human rights activist Zouheir Makhlouf, for posting a video on *Facebook* which exposed pollution and lack of basic services in Nabeul city and reiterated its call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Zouheir Makhlouf, who was today convicted of "harming others via the public telecommunications networks" by the Grombalia Court of First Instance, will now serve a three months' imprisonment for exposing pollution, lack of infrastructure and basic services in the city of Nabeul, on Tunisia's north-eastern coast. Amnesty International considers Zouheir Makhlouf to be a prisoner of conscience, solely detained for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and for his peaceful opposition to the Tunisian government.

The authorities' prosecution of Zouheir Makhlouf followed a complaint by one of the industrial workers featured in the video that his interview had been used without permission and that the video was harmful – a complaint apparently made following coercion by the security forces. Zouheir Makhlouf has also been sentenced to pay 6,000 dinar (approximately 3,100 euro) as compensation for the alleged harm caused.

The court delivered its verdict in writing. Zouheir Makhlouf, who is currently held at Mornaguia Prison near Tunis, was not brought to the courthouse.

Amnesty International is concerned that Zouheir Makhlouf's trial did not respect international standards for fair trial. Prosecution and defence witnesses were not heard and only three defence lawyers were allowed to present the case with interruption by the judge, who cut off the pleadings and then postponed the verdict to 1 December. Both hearings, on 3 and 24 November, were marked by a heavy police presence and representatives of civil society were forbidden from attending them. In the week before his final hearing on 24 November, Zouheir Makhlouf was not allowed to receive visits from his lawyers and family.

Zouheir Makhlouf is a former political prisoner, member the human rights organization, Liberty and Equity (*Liberté et Équité*). He writes for *Assabil Online*, a Tunisian news website. He is also a member of Amnesty International Tunisia.

Read more

Human rights activist facing trial for denouncing pollution in Tunisia (MDE 30/015/2009), 4 November 2009

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