

URGENT ACTION

TUNISIAN MAN AT RISK OF TORTURE

Former political prisoner Lotfi Dassi was arrested by security forces in Tunisia on 23 November, apparently in relation to his activities to secure financial aid for families affected by floods in the town of Redeyef. The authorities have not acknowledged that they are holding him. He may have been subjected to enforced disappearance and is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

State security officers arrested **Lotfi Dassi** in the city of Gafsa in south-western Tunisia, on the afternoon of 23 November. Officers in plainclothes then brought him to his home, where they confiscated his computer before leaving with him. Lotfi Dassi's wife, who was present when his home was searched, was not shown any search warrant; nor was she given any reason for his arrest. Later that day and on 24 November, she enquired about him at the police station in Gafsa. An officer unofficially told her that he has been transferred to the Ministry of Interior in Tunis, where he is believed to be held at the Department of State Security. Detainees held incommunicado there are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Despite his family's inquiries to the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and the Public Prosecutor, the authorities have yet to officially acknowledge holding Lotfi Dassi. His whereabouts, as well as any charges against him, remain unknown.

Lotfi Dassi's arrest appears to be related to his work for Marhama, a German-based NGO which says it provides humanitarian assistance to impoverished people in North Africa. Lotfi Dassi had apparently been identifying families in the mining town of Redeyef in the Gafsa region who were in need of financial assistance following heavy flooding in the town in September.

In 2007, Lotfi Dassi was imprisoned for belonging to an "unauthorized association" and "unauthorized fundraising" in reference to the banned Islamist organization Ennahda.

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

- Expressing concern that Lotfi Dassi has apparently been held in secret and incommunicado detention since 23 November in circumstances amounting to an enforced disappearance;
- Urging the Tunisian authorities to immediately disclose the whereabouts of Lotfi Dassi and ensure that he has access to his family, a lawyer of his own choosing and any medical care he might require;
- Urging them to ensure that he is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated;
- Urging them to release Lotfi Dassi, unless he is promptly charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial in proceedings that meet international standards for fair trial;
- Calling on the Tunisian authorities to return confiscated items belonging to Lotfi Dassi.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JANUARY 2010 TO:

Minister of the Interior and Local
Development

Rafik Belhaj Kacem
Ministry of the Interior and Local
Development
Avenue Habib Bourguiba
1000 Tunis, Tunisia
Fax: +216 71 340 888
Email: mint@ministeres.tn

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice and Human Rights
Béchir Tekkari
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis – La Kasbah, Tunisia
Fax: + 216 71 568 106
Email: mju@ministeres.tn
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

General Coordinator for Human Rights
Ridha Khemakhem
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights
31 Boulevard Bab Benat
1006 Tunis - La Kasbah, Tunisia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives of Tunisia accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Heavy flooding in late September 2009 was reportedly the cause of several deaths in the town of Redeyef, in the south western region of Gafsa. The town has been under the close scrutiny of the security forces since January 2008, when Redeyef was at the centre of peaceful protests by people marginalized by unemployment and other social issues. The ensuing crack down by the security forces left two protesters dead, and led to arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, and imprisonment after unfair trials.

In November, Amnesty International welcomed the release of 68 prisoners imprisoned in connection with the popular protests, following a presidential pardon. They had spent more than one year in prison and included many prisoners of conscience, who had been held solely for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly. Following the releases, the organization urged the Tunisian authorities to extend the pardon to all those who face charges on account of their peaceful involvement in the Gafsa protests and to lift restrictions imposed on released prisoners. The organization also called on the Tunisian authorities to make public the findings of any investigation into the killing by the security forces of the two Gafsa protestors.

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