

PUBLIC

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Further information on UA 116/99 (MDE 30/15/99, 21 May 1999) - Fear for safety

TUNISIA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS INCREASINGLY TARGETED

Surveillance and harassment of human rights defenders in Tunisia has been stepped up once again.

Human rights defenders and lawyers who work on human rights issues in Tunisia are being continually harassed and intimidated, including being arrested and imprisoned. Increasingly members of Amnesty International's Tunisian Section are being targeted despite the fact that they do not work on human rights issues concerning Tunisia.

Members of Amnesty International in Tunisia, including the President of the organization's International Executive Committee (IEC), are under close surveillance. The Amnesty International office in Tunis is under constant police surveillance.

Some Amnesty International members have had their telephone lines cut and their e-mail and regular mail intercepted or interfered with, while others have been questioned by plainclothes security agents about Section meetings and other activities, and others still have been pressured to "cooperate" with the security forces by passing on information about such meetings and activities.

Those questioned by security agents were told that they could expect further problems if they refused to "cooperate" or continued to be involved in Section activities.

Amnesty International and other international human rights organizations have expressed their concern at the continuing harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Tunisia many times, and have called on the Tunisian authorities to put an end to such practices.

In a press release issued on 18 October 1999 (MDE 30/35/99), Amnesty International said: "The Tunisian authorities lose no opportunity to publicly reiterate their commitment to human rights protection and promotion but this discourse sounds increasingly hollow in the face of such targeting of human rights defenders."

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past two 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.

Khemais Ksila, vice-president of the *Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'homme* (LTDH), Tunisian League for Human Rights, was conditionally released on 22 September 1999. He had been arrested in September 1997, after he issued a statement on the human rights situation in Tunisia. He had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Radhia Nasraoui, a human rights lawyer, has been continually harassed over several years because of her work. In March 1998, she was charged together with a group of students accused of links with the *Parti communiste des ouvriers tunisiens* (PCOT), Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, whom she was representing. She was accused of offences including links with a terrorist group, inciting rebellion and defamation of the authorities. She was given a six-month suspended prison sentence in July 1999. Her children and relatives are under constant surveillance and her eldest daughter, Nadia (16), has been intimidated in many occasions.

Former LTDH President Dr Moncef Marzouki, human rights lawyer Najib Hosni and others have also had their telephone lines disconnected and have been prevented from working. They and more than 25 other lawyers and many other human rights activists have had their passports confiscated.

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

- 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 lift current restrictions on human rights defenders, ensuring that their telephone and fax lines are restored and they are allowed to enjoy their right to freedom of movement inside and outside the country;
- 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:

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. Ali Chaouch
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:

M. Saïd Ben Mustapha
Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
Ministère des Affaires Etrangères
Place du Gouvernement

1006 Tunis, La Kasbah
Tunisie

Faxes: + 216 1 571 314

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 2 December 1999.