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Libya: The release of prisoners, a positive step

Amnesty International today warmly welcomes the announcement of the release of tens of prisoners, including prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience.

Among the prisoners of conscience were Muhammad 'Ali al-Akrami, al-'Ajili Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman al-Azhari, Muhammad 'Ali al-Qajiji, Salih 'Omar al-Qasbi and Muhammad al-Sadiq al-Tarhuni, who have been imprisoned for almost three decades, following their arrest in 1973 for their peaceful involvement with the prohibited Islamic Liberation Party.

"Their release is a positive development in the human rights situation in Libya, and we hope that it will soon be followed by the release of all detainees held solely on account of their peaceful political views or affiliation", Amnesty International today.

The organization remains concerned for the many long-term political prisoners, including prisoners of conscience and possible prisoners of conscience, who continue to suffer behind bars in Libyan prisons. Amnesty International has repeatedly called on the Libyan authorities to clarify the cases of these men, some of whom have been deprived of their liberty for more than a decade without charge or trial. Others have served lengthy prison terms after grossly unfair trials.

Amnesty International has been informed that many families, whose relatives' names did not feature on the list published by the *Gaddafi International Foundation for Charity Association* (GIFCA), have congregated outside Abu Salim prison in Tripoli, waiting hopefully for the possible release of their loved ones.

"The continued detention of these political prisoners is unjust. They must be released without delay or be tried promptly before an independent and impartial tribunal, in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness." Amnesty International urged.

Amnesty International further calls on the Libyan authorities to meet their international obligations to ensure compensation to all those found by an independent and impartial body to have been victims of torture or ill-treatment and arbitrary detention or imprisonment after a trial which failed to meet international standards for fairness.

Background

The prisoners' release was announced on 29 August 2002 by the *Gaddafi International Foundation for Charity Association* (GIFCA), headed by Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, a son of Colonel Mu'ammar al-Gaddafi,

to coincide with the 33rd anniversary of Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gaddafi's coming to power. Last year, the GIFCA announced the release of scores of prisoners to mark the 32nd anniversary. On 2 August 2002 the names of 62 people to be released were published by the GIFCA.

In his annual address to the nation, Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gaddafi reiterated his long-standing assertion that there are no political prisoners in Libya. According to media reports, Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gaddafi argued that those who remain in Libyan prisons have links to *al-Qa'idah* and as such the Libyan authorities would, "...treat them just like America is treating the others [in Guantanamo Bay].... America said, 'These people do not have the right to defend themselves, we will neither provide them with lawyers, nor will their human rights be respected.'"

Amnesty International reminds the Libyan authorities, as they have reminded the US and other authorities, of their obligations under international law and standards to respect and protect all persons deprived of their liberty within Libya. This includes ensuring respect for their fundamental rights, including the right of prompt access to and assistance of a lawyer; the right to be informed immediately upon arrest of the reasons for their arrest and promptly informed of any charges brought against them; the right to be brought promptly before a court; and the right to a fair trial.

These rights are contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Libya is a State Party; and the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, adopted by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly in 1988.

Public Document

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