

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 200/06 (MDE 28/016/2006, 20 July 2006) and follow-up (MDE 28/017/2006, 14 September 2006) - Secret detention/fear of torture

ALGERIA

Majid Touati (m) (please note corrected name)  
Mohamed Ajine (m)  
Zeineddine Belacel (m)  
Mohamed El Habib Boukhatemi (m)

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Mohamed Ajine, Zeineddine Belacel and Mohamed El Habib Boukhatemi were brought before a judge in the evening of 9 October, charged with "belonging to a terrorist group operating inside Algeria and abroad" and remanded in custody in Serkadji prison, Algiers. Majid Touati is detained in Chlef prison, some 200km west of Algiers, and has been given access to his lawyer and family. The four men, all from the town of Tiaret, are no longer believed to be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Mohamed Ajine, Zeineddine Belacel and Mohamed El Habib Boukhatemi did not have access to legal counsel when they were first presented to the judicial authorities. They had been detained in harsh conditions, apparently at the Antar barracks in Hydra, a secret detention centre in Algiers operated by the Department for Information and Security (*Département du renseignement et de la sécurité*, DRS). They told their lawyer that they had been subjected to beatings during interrogation and that they had not been allowed to read the interrogation reports which they were made to sign by DRS officers.

Zeineddine Belacel and Mohamed El Habib Boukhatemi declined to make a statement before the examining judge on 9 October without the presence of their legal counsel. Mohamed El Habib Boukhatemi and Mohamed Ajine were given access to their lawyer for the first time on 14 October. The three men appeared again before an examining judge, in the presence of their lawyer, on 16 October.

Majid Touati, who was brought before a judge on 11 September, was able to see his lawyer on 23 September. He had been detained for over five months without contact with the outside world, apparently at the Antar barracks in Hydra. He told his lawyer that he was tortured to force him to disclose information about an alleged terrorist network. He said that he was repeatedly tortured with the *chiffon* method, where the victim is forced to swallow large quantities of dirty water, urine or chemicals through a cloth placed in their mouth causing a feeling of suffocation or loss of consciousness. He reported that, when he lost consciousness, he was slapped on the face. He also reported that he was beaten with batons and fists; on one occasion he was apparently strapped down on a bench and beaten so severely with batons on his thighs that he was unable to walk for several days afterwards.

When he told the examining judge that he had been tortured, the judge reportedly replied that he did not want to hear about the allegations, and asked him instead to focus on the facts of the case. Majid Touati then apparently denied the allegations contained in the DRS interrogation report. He has been charged with "belonging to a terrorist group operating inside Algeria and abroad" and with falsifying documents.

**Amnesty International believes that the four men are no longer in immediate danger, but will continue to monitor their case. No further action is requested from the UA network at present. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.**