

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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EXTRA 37/95

Prisoner of conscience / Ill-treatment

29 March 1995

MOROCCO

Khadija BENAMEUR (female), trade unionist

Khadija Benameur, a trade unionist arrested whilst taking part in a peaceful protest, was sentenced on 20 March 1995 to one year's imprisonment. Her appeal hearing is imminent but no date has yet been set.

She was one of a group of six workers arrested on 14 March whilst participating in a peaceful sit-in at an agro-industrial complex in Sidi Slimane. Workers at the complex had been on strike since 21 February and the sit-in was staged to call for the respect of Moroccan labour laws and of internationally recognized labour rights. Three of those arrested were released on bail and are due to be tried on 5 April, whilst the other two were tried with Khadija Benameur on 20 March. They were charged under Article 288 of the Moroccan Penal Code, which allows for the imprisonment of people who organize or participate in a concerted withdrawal of labour. Additional charges against Khadija Benameur's co-defendants of drug offences, which they denied, were the only charges retained against them and they were sentenced to one and two months' imprisonment.

Khadija Benameur, who is Secretary General of her factory's branch of the *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT, Moroccan Labour Union), was additionally charged with offending the person of the King, under Article 179 of the Moroccan Penal Code. She was reportedly accused of having said that her employer should be saluted rather than the King. She denied the charge and witnesses called by the defence were not allowed to appear in court.

In addition, it is alleged that Khadija Benameur and her two co-defendants were severely ill-treated in police detention following their arrest. Requests made by the defence lawyers for a medical examination were rejected by the Public Prosecutor, and although the defendants reportedly still bore marks of bruising on their faces and hands when they appeared in court for the trial, their lawyers were repeatedly prevented by the court from raising these concerns.

Amnesty International considers Khadija Benameur to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and association. The organization is currently monitoring the cases of the five other people arrested on 14 March.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Khadija Benameur was arrested earlier in February 1995 during the course of the strike and charged under the same Article 288; on this occasion she was tried and acquitted. Elsewhere, in Sidi Kacem, six other members of the UMT, also on strike, were arrested and tried on 20 March 1995, charged under Article 288; they received suspended sentences of two months' imprisonment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams, faxes or airmail letters either in French, Arabic, English or in your own language:**

- expressing concern that Khadija Benameur has been imprisoned solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression and of association, stating that these rights are guaranteed by international standards including the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a

state party;

- stating that Amnesty International considers her to be a prisoner of conscience and urging the authorities to release her immediately and unconditionally;  
 - expressing concern at allegations that she and her two co-defendants were ill-treated after arrest in police detention and urging the authorities to carry out a prompt and independent investigation into these allegations, and to bring those responsible to justice.

**APPEALS TO**

Justice Minister

**M. Abderrahmane Amalou**

Ministre de la Justice  
 Ministère de la Justice  
 Palais de la Manounia  
 Rabat, Morocco

**Telegrams: Ministre Amalou, Rabat, Morocco**

**Faxes: c/o Ministry of Interior: +212 7 763011 "Veuillez je vous prie faire suivre au Ministre de la Justice" ("please forward to the Justice Minister")**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

1) Minister for Human Rights:

**M. Mohamed Ziyane**

Ministre délégué auprès du Premier Ministre  
 chargé des Droits de l'Homme  
 47 Avenue Ibn Sina  
 Agdal  
 Rabat, Morocco

**Faxes: + 212 7 672018 or + 212 7 671967**

2) Governmental Human Rights Body:

**M. Mohamed Mikou**

Secrétaire général  
 Conseil consultatif des droits de l'homme  
 24 Place des Chouhada  
 BP 1341  
 Rabat, Morocco

and to diplomatic representatives of Morocco accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 April 1995.