



Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

The University of Arizona · 1232 North Cherry Avenue · Tucson, Arizona 85721

20 February 1995

M. Sadok Chaabane
Ministre de la Justice
Ministere de la Justice
Boulevard Bab Benat
Tunis, Tunisia

Dear Minister Chaabane:

We are writing to express our concern about the incarceration of three students from the executive and federal bureau of the Union General des Etudiants Tunisiens in the Sousse prison.

The Middle East Studies Association comprises 2400 academics worldwide who teach and conduct research on the Middle East and North Africa. The association publishes the respected *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and is committed to ensuring respect for the principles of academic freedom and human rights throughout the region.

We understand that Tahar Gargoura, Ridha Errasas, and Zine Essaid were arrested at the University of Sousse on November 2, 1994, after meeting with the university campus director to discuss accusations that some other students had participated in disturbances, which had reportedly occurred on previous days. On January 18, 1995, they were sentenced to imprisonment for six months for belonging to PCOT, the Tunisian workers' communist party, an unauthorized association. As such, they seem to be prisoners of conscience who have been imprisoned because of their political beliefs and associations. Treating people as criminals simply because of their political beliefs and associations violates fundamental civil and political rights.

Aggravating circumstances include the unhealthy conditions in the Sousse prison where they have been detained and the inability of Tahar Gargoura and Ridha Errasas to obtain needed medical treatment. We understand that Mr. Gargoura has tuberculosis and that Mr. Errasas has contracted a skin disease.

We respectfully urge cessation of the practice of arresting persons by reason of their political beliefs and affiliations, and call for the immediate release of these three students. We further express our grave concern over the practice of detaining students in unhygienic facilities and failing to allow them access to needed medical care.

Respectfully,

Anne H. Betteridge
Executive Director

cc: M. Habib Ben Yahia, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
M. Salem Makki, Conseiller Présidentiel chargé des droits de l'homme
The Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH
The Union Général des Etudiants Tunisiens, UGET
Ambassador Ismail Khelil