



## Middle East Studies Association of North America, Inc.

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

April 3, 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 case of Jalel Maalej, who has been tried and sentenced to three years in jail for membership in an illegal association.

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 Mr. Maalej, a Tunisian academic resident in France, was arrested at the Tunis airport on December 4, 1994, after which he was held in prolonged incommunicado detention in violation of the 10-day legal limit on garde a vue detention. We understand that he was finally tried in Sfax on February 4, 1995, on charges of membership in al-Nahda, an illegal association, and attending meetings of this association in France. He has, we gather, denied these charges. He was sentenced on February 8, 1995, to three years in jail and two years of control administratif. It appears that he was convicted under the new provision of November 1993 that enables Tunisian courts to prosecute Tunisian nationals for their activities abroad -- such as attending meetings of associations banned in Tunisia.

From these accounts, it appears that Jalel Maalej has been imprisoned in Tunisia for peaceful activities that were legal in France. Punishing citizens for exercising their right to freedom of association in a foreign country entails a violation of international human rights and involves an unwarranted extension of Tunisian criminal law to foreign soil.

We respectfully urge that Mr. Maalej be immediately released. In the event that he is not released before his appeal from his conviction is heard, we urge that all measures be taken to ensure that international standards for fair proceedings be observed in all matters pertaining to his appeal. We also urge a rescission of the law allowing Tunisians to be prosecuted for peaceful associational activities.

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