

TUNISIA

Highlight the main issues of concern

- 1. Freedom of association and repression critics of Government**
- 2. Freedom of religion**

1. Persecution of Supporters of An-Nahdah (Renaissance) Movement in Tunisia

There are currently about 100 An-Nahdha supporters who have been detained since the early 1990s, following unfair trials in military courts that violated international standards, solely because of their opposition to government policies. They were accused of allegedly planning to overthrow the state. An-Nahdha leaders in exile have always denied these charges and insist that their organization believes in bringing about change through peaceful and democratic means.

In particular, IHRC is concerned about Dr Sadok Chourou, former president of *An-Nahdha*, and Mr Abdelkarim Harouni, another leading member and student union leader of Tunisian General Union of Students (UGTE). Both of them were arrested in 1991 and after being tried in a military tribunal in August 1992, held for 265 leading members of An-Nahdah, they were both handed down sentences of life-imprisonment. Like other An-Nahdah prisoners, both were reportedly subjected to severe torture at the hands of the Interior Ministry.

Both of them are being held in solitary confinement and are deprived of medical attention and nutritious meals. Both Dr Chourou and Mr Harouni have been on hunger strikes to appeal against their inhumane treatment. Tens of *An-Nahdah* prisoners have reportedly died in detention in the past owing to the harsh treatment they were subjected to in prison. Mr Harouni has also been deprived of meeting his family regularly; on 20 Dec 2003 he had his first 'direct' family visit after more than twelve years, with no divider separating him and his relatives. He had his prison sentence reduced to a thirty-year sentence in 2002 following a presidential pardon.

According to Amnesty International, 21 of the *An-Nahdah* members were awarded conditional release on 24 July 2007. Any former prisoner who breaches the conditions of his release can be re-arrested and made to serve the remainder of his sentence by decision of the Minister of Justice, without any judicial process, or placed under house arrest for the same period. Most of them had been imprisoned for the past 14 years.

Amnesty further stated that many former political prisoners have been denied the right to work or travel or access to medical care. Many have been subjected to administrative control whereby the authorities choose their residence and can change it as and when they deem appropriate.

The Tunisian authorities continue to detain people under the 2003 anti-terror laws for association or membership of unauthorized organizations. According to Human Rights Watch, there are currently several hundred such persons being held in pre-trial detention.

2. Freedom of religion: the Hijab ban

Law no. 108 of 1981 bans Tunisian women from wearing hijab inside the state-run bodies. Some women have been ordered to remove their hijab before being allowed into schools, universities or workplaces and others forced to remove them in the street.