

TUNISIA**Mohammed Abbou****internet writer, lawyer, human rights defender**

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Mohammed Abbou, a member of the National Council for Civil Liberties, was sentenced in April 2005, after an unfair trial, to three and a half years in prison, largely for publishing two internet articles critical of the Tunisian authorities and denouncing torture in Tunisia. His sentence was confirmed on appeal in June 2005.

Mohammed Abbou had published an online newspaper, in which he criticized Tunisian prisons. He was detained on 1 March 2005 and charged with disseminating false information, libel, enticing people to break the law, and publishing offenses.

He is imprisoned in the town of El-Kef, approximately 200 kilometers from his home in Tunis, making visits by his family difficult; some of their visits have been truncated or canceled. His wife has reported harassment in his absence. On 2 March 2005, hundreds of lawyers who gathered to protest his detention were assaulted by plainclothes officers.

Mohammed Abbou has undertaken several hunger strikes to protest conditions of detention, which deteriorated further following a demonstration in support of his case outside the prison at the beginning of March 2006. On more than one occasion, he has been awakened in the middle of the night to have his cell searched by prison guards. Following a request to change his cell, which he shared with criminal prisoners, he reportedly was beaten by prison guards and his mattress was removed, forcing him to sleep on an iron bedstead. He also has been harassed by other prisoners, seemingly at the instigation of the prison authorities. In March 2006, during a hunger strike against his detention and harassment, he lost consciousness during a family visit.

In November 2005, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that Mohammed Abbou's detention was indeed arbitrary and in violation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee the right to freedom of expression.

Please call for the immediate and unconditional release
of prisoner of conscience Mohammed Abbou.

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1006 Tunis - La Kasbah
Tunisia

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