



INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS

Commission internationale de juristes - Comisión Internacional de Juristas

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Tunisia and the World Summit on the Information Society: lack of respect for the right to freedom of opinion and expression

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) expresses its grave concerns at the unwillingness of the Tunisian Government, host to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in November 2005, to implement the right to freedom of opinion and expression. The arbitrary detention and sentence imposed on lawyer Me Mohammed Abbou for exercising this right constitute a paradox with regard to the very principles on which the WSIS is premised.

Me Abbou was sentenced to three-and-a-half-year in April 2005 during a blatantly unfair trial relating to two distinct charges. After publishing an article in August 2004 comparing the conditions of detention in Tunisian jails with those in the Abu Ghraib jail in Iraq, Me Abbou was sentenced for "publication of writings likely to disturb public order" and "defamation of the judiciary". One week before the trial he was also accused of aggressing a lawyer in June 2002 – a charge that could not be proved. The sentence was confirmed in June 2005.

In a letter sent today to the Chair of the PrepCom-3, Ambassador Janis Kärklins, Mr. Nicholas Howen, Secretary General of the ICJ recalled that "sharing and accessing information is only meaningful if it is guaranteed as a right - the right to freedom of opinion and expression, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The WSIS itself has stressed the fundamental importance of the Universal Declaration in implementing its vision of a development-oriented Information Society.

In his letter, Mr. Nick Howen stressed that "hosting a World Summit on the Information Society should bring with it extra commitments to respect the fundamental rights on which the Summit is based." The ICJ considers that Me Abbou's arbitrary detention and sentence fly in the face of such commitments, and has requested the Chair of the PrepCom-3 to call on the Tunisian authorities to uphold their international obligations and to immediately and unconditionally release Me Abbou.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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