

## **Tunisia Monitoring Group Welcomes Liberation of Mohamed Abbou**

On Tuesday, 24 July 2007, Tunisian dissident, writer and lawyer Mohamed Abbou was released from prison in Le Kef, Tunisia, where he had been held since his arrest in March 2005. Abbou was sentenced to prison for three-and-a-half years for exposing torture in Tunisian prisons on the Internet.

Members of the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) Tunisian Monitoring Group (TMG), who have been campaigning for his release - including trying to visit him in prison in March - joined the Observatory for Freedom of the Press, Publishing and Creation (Observatoire pour la liberté de presse, d'édition et de creation, OLPEC), and other rights groups in Tunisia in welcoming his release.

In a statement to Al Jazeera Tuesday evening, Abbou said, "As a former prisoner of conscience, I would like to thank all those in Tunisia and the rest of the world who stood by my side during the ordeal I have been through. The Tunisian authorities offered time and again to release me from prison on condition of signing a letter of apology. But I refused to do so."

"My release is the result of actions of resistance to oppression undertaken by Tunisians capable of saying no to a regime in violation of basic human rights. The Tunisian Constitution and international human rights law guarantee the right to criticise the government, as long as there are human rights abuses and corruption. The lack of freedom led some young people to use violence which I strongly denounce," added Abbou in his first interview since his arrest in March 2005.

Abbou's case has largely been a symbol of Tunisia's appalling human rights record and the subject of numerous campaigns and days of action.

International freedom of expression and human rights groups are extremely happy about the release. In a statement last night, TMG Chair Carl Morten Iversen of Norwegian PEN conveyed congratulations and best wishes from the IFEX-TMG to the Abbou family, at the same time assuring Abbou that the TMG and other human rights groups will keep a close eye on the way Tunisian authorities will treat him and his family in the future.

The release of Abbou and more than twenty political prisoners came on the eve of the 50th Anniversary of the Proclamation of the Republic of Tunisia, marked on 25 July.

The IFEX-TMG expresses the hope that significant steps toward freedom of expression in Tunisia will follow Abbou's release, and that police and judicial harassment of journalists and human rights defenders should be brought to an end in the wake of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Tunisia.

For more background information on the case and on the IFEX TMG, please see:

- TMG(English):<http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/>
- TMG(French):<http://campaigns.ifex.org/tmg/fr>
- TMG (Arabic): <http://hrinfo.net/ifex/wsis>

Oslo, 25 July 2007

Members of the IFEX-TMG are:

Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (HRINFO), Egypt

ARTICLE 19, UK

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), Canada

Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), Egypt

Index on Censorship, UK

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Belgium

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), The Netherlands

International Press Institute (IPI), Austria

International Publishers' Association (IPA), Switzerland

Journaliste en danger (JED), Democratic Republic of Congo

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Namibia

Norwegian PEN, Norway

World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), Canada

World Association of Newspapers (WAN), France

World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC), USA

Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN (WiPC), UK