

Amnesty International
Libya: Growing fears for safety of government critic

Amnesty International is calling on the Libyan government to disclose immediately the whereabouts and legal status of Idriss Boufayed, who has been detained incommunicado since 5 November 2006, amid growing concern for his safety.

Idriss Boufayed, a longstanding critic of the Libyan government, returned to Libya from Switzerland, where he had lived since 1990, on 30 September 2006. He was questioned on arrival and security officials confiscated his passport but he was then able to return to the family home in Gheryan. At around midnight on 1 November, however, security officials visited him there and told him to report next day to the office of the Internal Security Agency in Gheryan. He did so but was told to report to the agency's Tripoli office at 10am on 5 November. When he did this, he was arrested and since then he has been detained incommunicado. The authorities have given no explanation for his arrest and detention and have not disclosed, even to his family, where he is being held. Unconfirmed reports suggest that he is being held under guard in a psychiatric hospital in Tripoli known as Gargaresh and that his health has deteriorated during his seven weeks in incommunicado detention.

Idriss Boufayed, aged 49, is a surgeon by profession but also a co-founder and secretary general of the National Union of Reform ? Nur, an organization which has been critical of the political situation in Libya in recent years. He decided to return to Libya from Switzerland, where he was recognized as a refugee, reportedly after receiving assurances from the Libyan People's Bureau in Bern that he would not be at risk from the authorities and after the Bureau - Libya's embassy in Switzerland - issued him with a Libyan passport earlier this year.

In a letter sent today to 'Ali 'Omar Abu Bakr Al-Hasnawi, Secretary of the Libyan government's General People's Committee for Justice, Amnesty International expressed concern that Idriss Boufayed may be a prisoner of conscience and called for immediate clarification of the reason for his arrest and detention, his legal status and whereabouts. The organization said he should be released immediately and unconditionally unless he is to be charged and brought to trial fairly and promptly on recognizably criminal charges, that he should be given immediate access to legal counsel and that he should be protected at all times from possible torture or ill-treatment.

His continuing detention violates Libya's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.