

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



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THE TUNISIAN QUESTION

Note by the President

The President of the General Assembly has the honour to transmit to the Members of the General Assembly a copy of a letter dated 16 March 1953, together with an accompanying memorandum, which he has received from the Delegations of Afghanistan, Burma, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen. At the request of these Delegations, the letter and the accompanying memorandum have been referred by the President to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, for the consideration of his Government.

53-07237

Letter dated 16 March 1953 from the Delegations of Afghanistan, Burma, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Yemen, addressed to the President of the General Assembly

New York, 16 March 1953

We are obliged to draw your attention to the dangerous situation still existing in Tunisia and the repressive measures which continue, we believe, to be taken by the French Government in an intensified manner.

It will be recalled that the General Assembly, after consideration of the Tunisian question, adopted resolution 611 (VII) at its 404th plenary meeting on 17 December 1952. We regret that the Government of France has so far given no indication that it intends to implement the provisions of this resolution or to abide by its spirit.

It insists that negotiations proceed only on the formula of its own choice and only with a so-called Tunisian Government of its own making. It has extended and intensified its policy of repression both through its armed forces and through the machinery of the military tribunals in Tunisia. It has taken no effective measures to curb the campaign of terrorism directed by underground organizations against nationalist leaders. This policy of the French Government is contrary both to the spirit of the Charter and to the appeal to both parties in resolution 611 (VII) to refrain from any acts or measures likely to aggravate the present tension.

We request you to place this letter and the accompanying memorandum based on the best available information before the Government of France and to urge it to take the prompt and liberal measures required by the situation existing in Tunisia.

We request you in particular, in the interest of justice and humanity, to intercede to secure a stay of execution of those prisoners sentenced to death by the French military tribunals in Tunisia. The following are known to be among those thus condemned:

Othman Haj Ahmed
Abdullah Hassan
Ali Abdurrazak Sandor
Habib Hamda Ammar
Ahmed Ali Gherissi
Ali Amor Ben Gacem
Chaffai Ahmed Ali
Abdulkader Haiga
Ferjani Abdurrahman
Tahar Ali
Ahmed Abou Bakr
Nouredine Abdulkader
El Hadi Tlili

The execution of these prisoners on the basis of the summary trials conducted by these tribunals would be both a grave miscarriage of justice and a further violation of resolution 611 (VII). The situation in Tunisia would be further worsened and the peaceful settlement which is desired by all Member nations, but which is already being prejudiced by French repressive actions, would become even more difficult to secure.

It is to be hoped that speedy action to remedy the situation will be taken in view of the facts above mentioned, thereby relieving us of the necessity of referring the Tunisian question again to the appropriate body of the United Nations.

We shall be grateful if the text of this letter and the attached memorandum is circulated as a United Nations document.

(Signed)

Mohammed Kahir LUDIN
Chairman, Delegation of Afghanistan
to the General Assembly

U KYIN
Chairman, Delegation of Burma
to the General Assembly

Ahmed Galal Eldine ABDELRAZEK
Chairman, Delegation of Egypt
to the General Assembly

Vijaya Lakshmi PANDIT
Chairman, Delegation of India
to the General Assembly

L.N. PALAR
Chairman, Delegation of Indonesia
to the General Assembly

N. ENTEZAM
Chairman, Delegation of Iran
to the General Assembly

Abdullah BAKR
Acting Chairman, Delegation of Iraq
to the General Assembly

Karim AZKOUL
Acting Chairman, Delegation of
Lebanon to the General Assembly

Henry F. COOPER
Chairman, Delegation of Liberia
to the General Assembly

Ahmed BOKHARI
Chairman, Delegation of Pakistan
to the General Assembly

Carlos P. ROMULO
Chairman, Delegation of the
Philippines to the General Assembly

Faisal AL-SAUD
Chairman, Delegation of Saudi
Arabia to the General Assembly

Farid ZEINEDDINE
Chairman, Delegation of Syria
to the General Assembly

Saif Al Islam ABDULLAH
Chairman, Delegation of Yemen
to the General Assembly

Memorandum

Resolution 611 (VII) expressed the Assembly's confidence that the Government of France would endeavour to further the effective development of the free institutions of the Tunisian people, in conformity with the provisions and principles of the Charter. It also expressed the hope that the parties would continue negotiations on an urgent basis with a view to bringing about self-government for Tunisians. Finally, the resolution appealed to the parties concerned to conduct their relations and settle their disputes in accordance with the spirit of the Charter and to refrain from any acts or measures likely to aggravate the present tension.

The Government of France, however, is prepared to resume negotiations only on the basis of the so-called reform programme submitted by the French Resident-General to His Highness the Bey; and it is prepared to negotiate only with the Government appointed by the French after the forcible deposition of the Cabinet headed by M.Chenik. The Bey's plea for the restoration of a representative Government has been refused consideration.

The Government of France has also ignored the appeal made by the Assembly to the parties, to refrain from any acts or measures likely to aggravate the present tension in Tunisia. No restoration of civil liberties has taken place. On the contrary, the policy of repression has been extended and intensified. Armed repression by the French forces continues. According to our information, houses are systematically searched, women are ill-treated, the food supplies in chosen areas are destroyed and the homes of patriots are sought out by the police and demolished with dynamite. During the three months following the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 611 (VII), numerous executions by French troops have taken place in the cities of Gafsa and Medinine. The following, we are informed, are among those who were arbitrarily taken prisoner and executed without even the pretense of a trial:

Northern Region (Ras Jebel)

Hadi Mohamed Charadou
Hadi Jeridi
Ahmed Gacem Zarrouk

Southern Region (Tatahouine)

Hamadi Sadek
Abdullah Tounkti
Ali Tounkti
Thami Kouerki
Mongi Chaleb
Abderrahman Ali Khelifa
Bechir (Medinine)
Zouhir (Medinine)
Marsah (Medinine)
Chaou (Medinine)

Two prisoners with the name Salah, in the city of Sousse

Gafsa

Mohammed Salah Abdelkader
Abdulhamid Ammar
Ben Khaddoum
Benfouli

Although it is alleged that those executed were insurgents, it is known that several of them were staying peacefully in their homes at the time of their seizure. In any event, execution without trial must be regarded as contrary both to the elementary principles of justice and to the appeal made to the parties in clause 3 of resolution 611 (VII).

The policy of armed repression is supplemented by summary trials and sentences meted out by the two permanent military tribunals now functioning in Tunis. Some twenty persons are sentenced every week by these tribunals to death or to hard labour. The process of investigation is perfunctory and "confessions" are frequently extorted by torture.

In the six months prior to 1 December 1952, the military tribunal pronounced ten sentences of death. It is noteworthy that in the three months which followed the adoption of resolution 611 (VII), no less than thirteen sentences of death have been pronounced.

The official campaign of repression is paralleled by the atrocities of "The Red Hand", a terrorist organization directed against the nationalist leaders. More than 100 attempts have been made by this organization on the lives and property of prominent nationalists. No measures seem to have been taken by the French Government to curb these terrorist activities and several of its outrages have in fact been committed on the basis of information accessible to the French police alone. After the Sub-Committee designated by the Bey of Tunis to study the so-called reforms proposed by the French Government had decided to reject them, members of the Committee were subjected to violent and concerted intimidation by "The Red Hand". Of the thirteen members, one was assassinated and ten others had their houses and property destroyed by bombs. Relatives of prominent nationalist leaders have also been the victims of systematic terrorism by "The Red Hand". The wife and nieces of Habib Bourguiba, President of the Neo-Destour Party, were victims of a bomb attack on 27 January 1953. The daughter of Mr. Mohammed Chenik, Prime Minister of the Cabinet forcibly deposed by the French suffered a similar outrage on the same day. Princess Zakia, the eldest daughter of the Bey and the wife of the Minister of Health in the Chenik Cabinet, was subjected to a bomb attack on 1 March. The mother of the Minister of Health was also attacked.

By its refusal to resume genuine negotiations and its attempts to compel the Tunisians to negotiate under duress, by intensifying its repressive measures and by permitting terrorist organizations to continue unchecked, the French Government is proceeding against the spirit of the Charter and is also committing and acquiescing in acts which must inevitably aggravate the existing tension.

Such a policy can only undermine the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security which it was the purpose of resolution 611 (VII) to reassert. It is plain that these principles cannot be developed and that valid negotiations cannot take place until the policy of repression ceases, the leaders of the Tunisian people are released and normal civil liberties are restored in Tunisia.