



# Send a message of hope to Ali Aarrass



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**We hope you will feel inspired to take action on all of our campaigns but remind you that all actions are optional.**

This mailing is also available to download at

[www.amnesty.org.uk/youth](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/youth)

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### IN A NUTSHELL

Ali Aarrass, a Belgian-Moroccan national and father of one, has been unlawfully detained by the Moroccan authorities since 2010. During this period Ali has been the victim of multiple human rights violations, including being held incommunicado\* and tortured. The Moroccan authorities have failed to appropriately investigate these abuses.

### BACKGROUND



Born in 1962 in the Spanish enclave of Melilla in northern Morocco, Ali Aarrass moved to Belgium when he was 15 years old and obtained Belgian nationality. He returned to Melilla in 2005 with his wife to live close to his aging father.

In 2006, Spanish authorities suspected Ali Aarrass of terrorism and began an investigation under the supervision of Baltasar Garzon, an anti-terrorism judge. Garzon closed the case after finding no evidence. However, Ali was imprisoned again in 2008 after Moroccan authorities requested his extradition\* on fresh charges. While detained in Spain, Ali was kept in solitary confinement for two years and eight months, an ordeal which caused him severe psychological distress.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2010, Ali was forcibly returned to Morocco from Melilla. Both Amnesty International and the United Nations Human Rights Committee warned that extradition would put him at risk of incommunicado detention, torture and unfair trial in Morocco. These warnings were ignored and Ali Aarrass was extradited to Morocco.

For the first 12 days of his imprisonment Ali was tortured in a secret detention centre. In 2013 Ali managed to smuggle out sketches he had drawn in prison illustrating how he was tortured. The pictures are extremely disturbing. They depict Ali:

- Being beaten on the soles of his feet
- Being given electric shocks
- Being suspended from his wrists
- Being burnt with cigarettes

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\* **Incommunicado:** deprived of any communication with others.

\* **Extradition:** to send someone back to the country where they are accused of a crime, so that a court there can decide if they are guilty.

## **YOUTH GROUP ACTION**

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 2011 Ali was convicted of allegedly using weapons illegally and supporting a group intending to commit acts of terrorism. The basis of his conviction was a ‘confession’ Ali gave, extracted during torture. Juan Mendez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, and an independent forensic\* doctor, visited Ali in detention in September 2012. Both confirmed his claims of torture.

The Moroccan authorities have continually failed to carry out the appropriate investigations into Ali Aarrass’ torture and claims he was held incommunicado. The only steps they have taken into investigating his torture claims were a forensic medical examination carried out one year after he was first tortured. The results directly conflict with the UN’s report. A second medical report prepared from an examination of Ali Aarrass in November 2014 was an improvement on the first medical report but it still fell short of the required standards in key areas.

### **UPDATE**

We last asked youth groups to take action for Ali in 2014. There have been a few updates on his case since then:

In November 2015 Ali’s lawyers found out that the investigations into his torture allegations by the authorities announced on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2014 had been closed. Ali’s lawyers told Amnesty that they were not informed by the authorities that any witnesses were questioned or that locations identified by Ali had been searched.

On 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016 Ali was transferred to Tifelt 11 Prison, 60km from Rabat, the capital of Morocco where he has been held in solitary confinement with one hour of courtyard time per day. This does not provide him with enough time to have meaningful relationships with other prisoners. According to his family and lawyers he sleeps on a concrete slab, he is allowed one shower a week and one brief, weekly call to his family. Ali’s health has significantly deteriorated. In May 2017 Ali’s appeal to the Court of Cassation (the highest court in Morocco) was turned down. Ali was denied a Royal Pardon on two occasions.

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\* **Forensic:** related to scientific methods of solving crimes, involving examining the objects or substances that are involved in the crime.

\* **Duress:** threats used to force a person to do something

## YOUTH GROUP ACTION

### TAKE ACTION – Send a message of solidarity to Ali

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Some of you may remember that we created a joke book for Ali in 2014. We asked youth groups to send us jokes as we heard Ali has a great sense of humour. We translated them into French and made them into a joke book. Ali loved it! (see below for how to order free copies of the joke book). We've heard that at the moment the best thing we can do for Ali is to send him some more messages of hope and solidarity from the outside world. Ali is still in solitary confinement but Farida (his sister) has advised that she has been allowed by the prison authorities to give him an additional blanket and nutritional supplements. We received a wonderful message from Ali at the end of August:

*“During my hour in the prison courtyard, after finishing the physical exercises, I always end up lifting up my eyes towards the sky. I just see it as a blue square, I observe and memorize it for the sad moments, in order to remind me that one day soon I will have again the right to observe it as a whole and among my people. This blue square reminds me that you are all still there outside under the same blue sky bothering yourselves for me. I cannot ignore all this efforts and sink into depression. I learnt to be very patient, otherwise that would be hard.”*

#### **Inspired by Ali's message we are asking you to:**

- write a solidarity letter/card to Ali to let him know you support him
- draw or photograph a picture of something they would like to see when released from prison if they had been in prison for seven years like Ali. The best pictures will be photographed and sent to him.

Send your letters, cards and pictures to: Anne Montague, 17-25 New Inn Yard, EC2A 3EA or email them to [anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:anne.montague@amnesty.org.uk). There is no deadline but we'd love you to send them to us by the end of the spring term if possible.

#### **Resources**

Joke book for Ali Aarrass: please call our mailing house on 01788 545553 and quote the code YA869.

More information on human rights in Morocco:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/morocco/>