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Tunisia: At a crossroads, Tunisia must choose the path of human rights

Progress on human rights in Tunisia that followed the ousting of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali is being rolled back by the current Tunisian Government, casting doubt on their commitment to reforms, Amnesty International warned as the country marked the first anniversary of National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elections.

In a new briefing, [*One step forward, two steps back?*](#), the organization examines the challenges facing human rights in Tunisia since the October 2011 elections and identifies worrying trends, making a series of detailed recommendations.

In the months following the ousting of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the caretaker government made important progress on the road to reform including the ratification of key international human rights treaties.

The authorities also ordered the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience held before the uprising, enacted new laws on the freedom of the press and lifted restrictions on the creation of associations.

However, the new government has failed to maintain these initiatives and a number of setbacks now cast a shadow on Tunisia's genuine commitment to human rights.

"Tunisia was the birth place of the momentous events that swept the region in 2011. And while we acknowledge that measures were taken by the authorities to address the legacy of abuse and move forward, these did not go far enough, and there are now worrying signs that these and other urgently needed reforms could be at risk," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International

Recent months have seen increased restrictions on freedom of expression, with journalists, artists, critics of the government, writers and bloggers targeted under the guise of maintaining public order and public morals. Those injured during the uprisings and the families of those killed feel the truth has not been told, as they wait for justice and reparation.

The Tunisian authorities have also appeared unable or unwilling to protect individuals from attacks by groups believed to be affiliated with Salafist groups.

A state of emergency in place since 14 January 2011 has been repeatedly renewed, most recently until the end of October 2012. Protesters, who have continued to take to the streets in different parts of Tunisia to express their dissatisfaction with the slow pace of reform, have been met with unnecessary and excessive force.).

During the year since the election of the NCA, Amnesty International received reports of torture and other

ill-treatment, many of them from protesters who alleged they were beaten during demonstrations, during arrest or in detention centres.

In another worrying sign, Tunisia's new government recently rejected the UN Human Rights Council's recommendation, made during its Universal Periodic Review of Tunisia, to abolish remaining provisions of Tunisian law which discriminate against women, to abolish the death penalty and to decriminalize same sex relations..

“Tunisia is at a crossroads. The authorities need to seize this historic opportunity and confront the painful legacy of abuse and violations of the past and enshrine in law and in practice universal human rights with the aim of making the rule of law a reality in the new Tunisia.

“The Constitution, to be finalized in the coming months, is a key test that will demonstrate whether Tunisia is firmly anchored in human rights and rule of law.”

About the briefing:

This briefing is based on ongoing monitoring of the human rights situation in Tunisia by Amnesty International since the uprising, including its most recent fact-finding visit to Tunisia between 17 and 28 September 2012. Amnesty International delegates interviewed many families of people killed during the uprising, and those injured during protests, in Kasserine, Regueb, Thala and greater Tunis. They included some of the same families and individuals Amnesty International had interviewed in January 2011 in the midst of the uprising. Delegates also spoke to lawyers, representatives of Tunisian and international human rights NGOs, journalists, government officials and diplomats.