

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER ON TRIAL

On 12 February 2026, the appeal trial of human rights lawyer Ahmed Souab will open before the Tunis Court of Appeal. The Tunis Court of First Instance had last October sentenced him to five years in prison following a grossly unfair trial that only lasted seven minutes. Since his arrest on 21 April 2025, the health of 69-year-old Ahmed Souab has significantly deteriorated in prison. He is currently detained in El Mornaguia prison, outside of Tunis. Since his conviction was related solely to his work as a lawyer and the exercise of his right to freedom of expression, Tunisian authorities must quash Ahmed Souab's unjust conviction and immediately and unconditionally release him. Authorities must ensure that human rights lawyers are able to freely carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment without any reprisals.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of the Republic Kais Saied
Route de la Goulette
Site archéologique de Carthage, Tunisie
Email: contact@carthage.tn
Twitter: @TnPresidency – [Facebook](#)

Your Excellency,

I write to you to express my grave concern following the unjust conviction and sentencing of human rights lawyer Ahmed Souab. He was sentenced under bogus charges, including 'forming a terrorist organization' and 'spreading fake news,' solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression and carrying out his professional duties. Ahmed Souab's arrest and prosecution are in retaliation for his criticism of the lack of due process and independence of the court regarding the 'conspiracy case' in which he was representing three defendants. Ahmed Souab's comments are protected under both Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, to which Tunisia is a state party.

On 31 October 2025, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced him to five years in prison following a grossly unfair trial. Ahmed Souab's trial, which only lasted seven minutes, was held without his physical presence as the court extended its decision to hold terrorism trials remotely citing a vague "imminent danger". The right of a defendant to be present at trial may be temporarily restricted only in exceptional circumstances.

Ahmed Souab's health has significantly and rapidly deteriorated after nine months of arbitrary detention in El Mornaguia prison. In January 2026, he suffered four episodes of severe nose bleeding, one of which led to a loss of consciousness and required the intervention of the prison medical staff. Additionally, Ahmed Souab suffers from chronic heart conditions which require adequate medical healthcare and frequent monitoring. His family is deeply concerned that they are unable to learn the cause of his bleeding, as the prison hospital lacks the necessary equipment to carry out the necessary medical examinations.

I therefore urge you to quash Ahmed Souab's unjust conviction and sentence and immediately and unconditionally release him. Pending this, I urge you to ensure that Ahmed Souab is provided with access to adequate healthcare, including in hospitals outside the prison, as required. I also call on your government to immediately cease targeted arrests of human rights defenders and allow them to freely carry out their human rights work in a safe and enabling environment without any reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ahmed Souab is a prominent Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender known for his outspoken criticism of violations of fair trial rights, executive interference with judicial independence and executive overreach, particularly under President Kais Saied's administration. He previously served as a judge at the Administrative Court and was a vocal critic of the dismantling of the rule of law following President Saied's 25 July 2021 power grab. He represented several high-level victims of violations like Sonia Dahmani in addition to lawyers and political opposition activists Ghazi Chaouachi and Ridha Belhaj, both defendants in the "conspiracy case".

On 19 April 2025, Ahmed Souab spoke in a press conference outside the Tunis Court of First Instance after the "[conspiracy trial](#)" was concluded in which 37 defendants including political opposition leaders were wrongfully sentenced on bogus charges of counter terrorism and conspiracy against the state. He had served as a lawyer representing several of the defendants and in his remarks, he criticized violations of due process that had taken place during the trial, executive interference in the judicial process and the lack of independence of the court. Two days later, the Counter-Terrorism Brigade [arrested Ahmed Souab](#) and interrogated him in relation to these comments. The counter-terrorism police unit held him in incommunicado detention for 48 hours, denying him access to his family and lawyer, before presenting him to the investigative judge of the Judicial Pole for Counterterrorism in Tunis.

On 23 April 2025 the judge ordered his pre-trial detention for six months pending investigation despite the lack of evidence suggesting involvement in any recognizable crime under international law. On 30 June 2025, the investigative judge concluded the investigation and formally charged him with "disclosing and spreading information directly or indirectly, by any means, for the benefit of terrorist organizations, or individuals connected to terrorist crimes, with the aim of assisting or facilitating their commission, or benefiting from them, or refraining from reporting them, or threatening to commit them. Such acts consist of providing or disclosing intentionally, to others, information that could endanger the safety of certain persons, or failing to report them," under Articles 1, 13 (new), 30, 34, 40, 43, 78, and 81 of the Law No. 26 of 2015 on counterterrorism. Additional charges were brought against him related to using telecommunications networks and communications under Article 24 of Decree Law 54 and Article 68 of the Telecommunications code.

Ahmed Souab's defense team appealed the judge's decision but on 17 July the accusation chamber indicted him under the above-mentioned charges and referred him to trial. His arrest and prosecution came in direct retaliation for his work in defence of victims of human rights violations and the legitimate exercise of his right to freedom of expression and professional activities. International human rights norms provide that lawyers should be able to carry out their professional functions without harassment or intimidation and protected as human rights defenders when they work to promote and protect rights, especially when representing victims of violations. By conflating legal advocacy with terrorism, the Tunisian authorities further undermine the right to fair trial, [judicial independence](#) and create a climate of fear that restricts human rights defenders from carrying out their essential work. Ahmed Souab's case is part of a broader campaign by Tunisian authorities targeting critics, including lawyers and human rights defenders.

Amnesty International has documented a pattern of misuse of counter-terrorism laws to prosecute peaceful dissent and a worrying trend of targeting lawyers representing members of political opposition groups, activists, and human rights defenders in Tunisia. In recent years, Tunisian authorities [have prosecuted or harassed several lawyers](#), solely for defending political prisoners or publicly criticizing the judiciary and the executive.

[The UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#) affirms that governments shall ensure that lawyers are able to perform all their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. According to principle I(b)(iii) of the Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, lawyers "shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics."

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French and English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 6 July 2026
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Ahmed Souab (He/Him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/9433/2025/en/>