

URGENT ACTION

ANTIRACISM FIGURE FACING EIGHT YEARS IN PRISON

On 19 March 2026, a Tunis court sentenced Black Tunisian woman human rights defender Saadia Mosbah, president of anti-racist organization Mnemty ["My dream"], to eight years in prison, after nearly two years in arbitrary pretrial detention. The court handed down prison terms ranging from one to three years against five other Mnemty staff and associates. Saadia Mosbah and her colleagues were prosecuted on unfounded financial criminal charges stemming from their human rights work, as part of a crackdown on civil society supported by racist public discourse. Saadia Mosbah reported racist abuse in detention, including a physical assault. Tunisian authorities must quash their convictions and immediately release Saadia Mosbah.

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
X: @TnPresidency

Your Excellency,

I write to urge you to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of woman human rights defender Saadia Mosbah who has been arbitrarily detained since May 2024. She is the president of anti-racist organization Mnemty ["My dream"], founded in 2013.

On 19 March 2026, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced Saadia Mosbah to eight years in prison and a fine of over TND 120,000 [about EUR 36,000]. She was prosecuted alongside eight other staff members and associates of Mnemty on unfounded financial criminal charges related to their human rights work. Five of them were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to three years; they risk arrest if their convictions are confirmed on appeal. The criminal convictions and prison sentences against Saadia Mosbah and her five colleagues must be immediately quashed.

The defendants were convicted of unsubstantiated charges of money laundering and "illicit enrichment". The investigation did not uncover any illegal sources of funding and relied on an abusive interpretation of the provision of "illicit enrichment" which lacks clarity. International human rights law and standards provide that to protect the presumption of innocence the burden of proof rests on the authorities to prove a criminal charge beyond reasonable doubt.

Prior to the judicial investigation, Mnemty faced a smear campaign led by pro-government social media accounts, amidst a surge in anti-Black and xenophobic discourses from public officials that has triggered racist violence. This context highlights the racial motives in the targeting of Saadia Mosbah and Mnemty, whose leading staff members are Black. The case also unfolded against the backdrop of a broader crackdown against human rights organizations and the stigmatization of anti-racism activists and civil society organizations working on migration, accused of treason and corruption by Tunisian officials. This has had a chilling effect on human rights defenders, undermining their safety and their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Once in prison, Saadia Mosbah reported facing racial discrimination including a racist physical assault by a prison guard that constitutes ill-treatment, possibly amounting to torture, and a lack of adequate medical care. The other defendants were also subjected to racial discrimination during the investigation, in violation of their right to a fair trial and to be protected from discrimination.

I urge you to ensure the immediate release of Saadia Mosbah and that the conviction and sentence against her and the five other Mnemty staff are quashed. I call on you to ensure that a thorough, independent, impartial, transparent and effective investigation is opened into the allegations of racist ill-treatment against Saadia Mosbah, which may amount to torture. I also urge you to cease using the criminal justice system against human rights defenders and to respect the rights to freedom of expression and association.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In May 2024, six human rights defenders and NGO workers were arrested and arbitrarily detained as the Tunisian authorities launched a [repressive clampdown](#) against civil society organizations working on migration and against discrimination. Five of them were later [sentenced](#) to prison while the crackdown [extended](#) to include a broader range of organizations. A xenophobic and racist smear campaign led by progovernment social media accounts preceded the arrests, mainly targeting the anti-racist organization Mnemty and its founder Saadia Mosbah. In parallel, Tunisian president Kais Saied [accused](#) organizations working on migration of being “traitors” and “foreign agents”. The president has repeatedly accused civil society of financing corruption and colluding with foreign parties to smear Tunisia.

On 7 May 2024, Tunis police arrested Saadia Mosbah after questioning her and Mnemty’s project manager about their NGO work, the funding they receive and their public positions on racism and migration. On 16 May 2024, an investigative judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance opened a criminal investigation against Saadia Mosbah and eight other Mnemty staff members and associates, including their Tunis office landlord, and placed Saadia Mosbah in pretrial detention without a hearing. Authorities investigated them for “illicit enrichment” (Article 37 of Law 2018-46 on the Declaration of Assets and Interests and the Fight against Illicit Enrichment and Conflicts of Interest) and money laundering (Articles 92 to 97 of Law 2015-26 on the Fight against Terrorism and the Repression of Money Laundering), as well as failing to maintain adequate accounting records (Article 97 of the Code on Tax Law and Procedures), a misdemeanor sanctioned by a fine. The judge renewed her detention in November 2024 and again, in March 2025, and has refused multiple requests for provisional release.

On 3 July 2025, the investigative judge concluded the investigation and retained the charges of “illicit enrichment” and failure to maintain accounting records against Saadia Mosbah while dismissing all charges against the other eight individuals for lack of evidence. On 15 July 2025, an indictment chamber overturned the judge’s decision, indicting all nine for all three charges. On 22 December 2025, in violation of Tunisian penal procedures, the trial opened at the Tunis Court of First Instance, before the Cassation Court had ruled on the appeals lodged by the defendants and the prosecution against the indictment. As a result, the examination of the case was postponed three times until the Cassation Court rejected the appeal on 10 March 2026.

Under Law 2015-26, money laundering requires evidence of the existence of the original crime covered by the laundered funds. Under Law 2018-46, “illicit enrichment” is defined as “any substantial increase in the assets of a person (...) or a significant increase in their expenses, disproportionate to their income, and for which they cannot justify the legitimacy of their origin”. The provision lacks clarity and does not require evidence of the unlawful origin of the funds, shifting the burden of proof on the defendant to demonstrate that they have been acquired “legitimately”. Under international human rights law and standards including Article 7 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and Article 14(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Principles on Fair Trial in Africa, the burden of proof rests on the authorities to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

Analysis of casefile documents including the court-mandated financial expertise indicates that the charges of “illicit enrichment” and money laundering are unsubstantiated. The investigation has not found proof of an original crime allegedly covered by laundered funds or evidence of any “enrichment” as defined by Tunisian legislation. Instead, it relied on an abusive interpretation of the term “legitimacy”. It considered that Mnemty staff’s alleged failure to comply with tax obligations and the financial experts’ misinformed assessment that some staff members’ positions and salaries did not align with their qualifications was evidence that the origin of their funds was not “legitimate”. The investigation also highlighted unjustified bank transfers between the association and its staff. The defendants explained these transfers as reimbursements for travel expenses or other payments made from staff members’ bank accounts on a few occasions when the association’s treasurer was abroad or when the association’s checkbook had been lost. Furthermore, racist comments made orally by the court-mandated financial experts against two Black defendants during the investigation, accusing them of “helping [racist slur for Black people]” and promising to “put them in prison for it”, in addition to the experts’ refusal to examine financial documentation seized by the police during the search of Mnemty’s Tunis office, has undermined the integrity of the investigation and the defendants’ right to a fair trial. A police agent at the Tunis Court of First Instance also systematically obstructed access to court for one of the Black defendants without justification, raising concern about possible racial discrimination.

Saadia Mosbah, 66, is detained at Belli prison (50km southeast of Tunis). By the end of March, she would have spent over 22 months in pretrial detention, beyond the legal limit of 14 months. She suffers from high blood pressure, gout and other health and mobility issues. She reported that a prison guard repeatedly subjected her to racist insults and mockery, obstructed one of her medical appointments and physically assaulted her in February 2026. Authorities have yet to inform her of the opening of an investigation into the allegations despite the prison administration having been informed. According to her family, authorities also failed to provide her with adequate medication and healthcare.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French, ~~English~~

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [End of September 2026]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Saadia Mosbah (she/her).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: First UA