

URGENT ACTION

OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS UNJUSTLY JAILED

On 28 November the Tunis Court of Appeal upheld the convictions and prison sentences of 34 defendants ranging from five to 45 years in the politically motivated “conspiracy case”. Authorities swiftly implemented the court’s unjust verdict against two of those sentenced who were not already in detention. On 29 November, plainclothes police officers violently arrested political activist Chaima Issa while she was at a peaceful demonstration in Tunis denouncing the crackdown on peaceful dissent in the country. Three days later, on 2 December, police officers arrested human rights lawyer Ayachi Hammami from his home in Tunis. On 4 December, police arrested prominent opposition figure Ahmed Nejib Chebbi from his home. Tunisian authorities should immediately quash the unjust convictions and sentences of all defendants in the unjust “conspiracy case” and immediately and unconditionally release all those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

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

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Email: contact@carthage.tn

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Presidence.tn>

Twitter/X: @TnPresidency

Your Excellency,

I write to express my grave concern following the arbitrary arrest and detention of political activist Chaima Issa, human rights lawyer Ayachi Hammami, and prominent opposition figure Ahmed Nejib Chebbi. They were arrested following the decision by the Tunis Court of Appeal to uphold the unjust convictions in the so-called “conspiracy case” against 34 defendants. Chaima Issa and Ayachi Hammami announced hunger strikes to protest their arbitrary arrest and detention.

Tunisian authorities undermined the fairness of this trial by violating due process of law, including the decision to deny detained defendants their right to appear in person and instead to hold proceedings remotely. The appeal court increased the sentences of a number of defendants, including political activists Jaouhar Ben Mbarek and Chaima Issa whose sentences were raised from 18 to 20 years. Lawyer and human rights defender Ayachi Hammami had his 5-year sentence confirmed and prominent opposition leader Ahmed Nejib Chebbi 12 years.

Among the 34 individuals sentenced in this trial, six opposition political figures – Khayyam Turki (sentenced to 35 years) Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, Issam Chebbi, Ghazi Chaouachi, Ridha Belhaj (20 years) and Abdelhamid Jelassi (10 years) have been held in arbitrary detention since the investigation began in February 2023. Other defendants in this case include several individuals who had been sentenced or held in pretrial detention in relation to other politically motivated cases, such as senior opposition figures Nouredine Bhiri (20 years), Sahbi Atig (10 years), and Said Ferjani (10 years) from the former ruling Ennahdha party. The court also sentenced in absentia 20 individuals living abroad, including prominent human rights defender Bochra Bel Haj Hmida, who was sentenced to 33 years in prison.

I urge you and your government to quash the unjust convictions and sentences of all defendants and to immediately and unconditionally release those who are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights. Finally, I urge you and your government to cease the politically motivated prosecutions of critics, political opponents, human rights defenders and activists.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 'conspiracy case' in Tunisia involves the prosecution of 37 opposition figures, lawyers, and activists on politically motivated charges, primarily "conspiracy against state security," which carry severe prison sentence with them.

In April 2025, the Tunis Court of First Instance handed down harsh prison terms, ranging from four to 66 years, following a trial widely condemned for its grave fair trial violations, lack of transparency and executive interference. Defendants were not allowed to be present for their trial, based on the court's decision to hold all terrorism trials remotely since April 2024, citing "imminent danger" without any justification. The trial was undermined by a lack of transparency and due process of law. Evidence was neither publicly presented nor subjected to cross-examination, and access to the courtroom was denied to several independent journalists, civil society representatives, and members of the diplomatic community. The defendants who were not allowed to attend in person, were not allowed to speak, and their lawyers were not given the opportunity to present their arguments before the court delivered its verdicts.

Those sentenced included political opposition activists from across the political spectrum, businessman, lawyers, human rights defenders and activists over two years after the investigation started in February 2023. The defendants were sentenced based on unfounded charges of conspiracy under 10 provisions of the Tunisian Penal Code including Article 72, which mandates the death penalty for trying to "change the nature of the state." They were also sentenced on bogus terrorism related charges under the 2015 counterterrorism law including Article 32, which mandates up to 20 years of imprisonment for "forming a terrorist organization". The charges and evidence presented were based solely on the defendants' involvement in organizing political opposition or meetings including with foreign nationals — none of which constitute a criminal offense.

Authorities had arbitrarily detained eight of the defendants in pre-trial detention since their arrest in February 2023 exceeding the legal limit of 14 months set out in the Code of Criminal Procedure: including politician Khayyam Turki, businessman Kamel Ltaief; politician Abdelhamid Jelassi; opposition activist Issam Chebbi; opposition activist Jaouhar Ben; and lawyers and political activists Ghazi Chaouachi and Ridha Belhaj. Security forces arrested Chaima Issa and Lazhar Akremi in February 2023, but they were provisionally released on 13 July 2023 after nearly five months of arbitrary detention. Following their release, authorities banned them from travelling abroad and "appearing in public spaces".

On 4 March 2025, the appeal trial opened, yet again without defendants being permitted to attend in court in violation of their fair trial rights. It was subsequently postponed to 11 and then 18 April. In advance, the court informed the Bar Association that all terrorism trials in March and April would proceed with detainees appearing remotely from prison, vaguely citing a "real danger" as justification. This measure was challenged by both the detainees and their legal teams, who asserted their right to appear in person. The detainees refused to participate in the proceedings unless physically present in the courtroom.

On 24 October 2025, defense lawyers learned that the initial appeals hearing had been scheduled for 27 October and would be held remotely via video conference for the 12 defendants in detention, in violation of their due process rights. The detained defendants were notified only on the day of the hearing, while the others received no summons. On 27 October, the hearing was adjourned until 17 November and then until 27 November.

On 24 April 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, [called the verdict a setback to justice and the rule of law](#). Turk had previously expressed concerns over the arrests of political opposition figures in relation to conspiracy charges in [February 2023](#). On 22 February 2023, President Saïed [declared](#) that anyone who "dared to exonerate" what he described as "criminal networks" was, in essence, an "accomplice." This statement, coupled with the president's [arbitrary dismissal](#) of 57 judges in 2022, has contributed to a growing climate of intimidation of the judiciary. On 8 October 2024, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention issued an [opinion](#) concluding that "the violations of the eight individuals' right to due process and a fair trial are of such gravity as to render their detention arbitrary" and recommending their immediate release.

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: 5 June 2026

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Group UA (They/Them)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/9437/2025/en/>