

International legal and human rights organisations condemn the Tunisian authorities' escalating attacks on the legal profession, the independence of the judiciary and civil society

39 organisations, including bar associations, lawyers' groups, judges' associations and human rights organisations, condemn the Tunisian authorities' escalating and systematic campaign of intimidation, obstruction and retaliation against lawyers, judges, the Tunisian National Bar Association, magistrates' associations and independent civil society organisations in the country.

Since President Saïed's consolidation of executive power in 2021 and the summary dismissal of 57 judges and prosecutors by presidential decree in 2022, Tunisia has witnessed a sustained deterioration in the rule of law and respect for Human Rights. The authorities have resorted to using criminal proceedings, suspension orders, travel bans, administrative obstruction and smear campaigns against those who defend human rights, against those who challenge executive interference in the judiciary, document human rights violations and defend or otherwise support victims of such violations.

The attacks described in this statement form part of a broader pattern of interference with the independence of the legal profession, the judiciary and civil society in Tunisia. The deterioration of judicial independence, the targeting of lawyers and the restrictions imposed on civil society have serious implications for the rule of law and for access to justice. These attacks strike directly at the right to fair trial including the right to defence, and undermine access to justice, due process, freedom of expression, freedom of association and the rule of law.

The authorities' attack on the Tunisian National Bar Association

The undersigned organisations are particularly alarmed by the Tunisian authorities' escalating attacks on the Tunisian National Bar Association (ONAT) and the legal profession as a whole. An independent, self-governing legal profession is key to a proper administration of justice for victims of human rights violations. ONAT aims to protect the professional integrity of its members, ensures access to legal services, upholds fair trial guarantees and works to protect the rule of law. Therefore, interference with the ONAT undermines not only the interests of the legal profession but access to justice for all and the integrity of the justice system as a whole.

Over the past months, ONAT has urged the authorities [to address deteriorating working conditions](#) in the courts, including the lack of basic equipment and shortages of judicial and administrative staff. It has also denounced unjustified remote trials, violations of fair trial guarantees, attacks on judicial independence and executive interference in the justice system. Following a failure by authorities to provide any meaningful response, the ONAT convened an extraordinary general assembly on 1 May 2026 to address both lawyers' professional grievances and the broader crisis in the justice system. The General Assembly adopted a decision to carry out protest actions such as a general strike. Rather than engaging with ONAT's demands, the Tunis prosecutor challenged the procedures of the assembly in court seeking to nullify the decision that was adopted. The board of ONAT subsequently announced a mobilisation plan, including regional strikes, red-aramband protests in courts and a [nationwide general strike](#) planned for 18 June 2026.

ONAT has made clear that its [mobilisation](#) is not limited to professional grievances. It aims to defend the legal profession, safeguard the public justice system and uphold fair trial guarantees. The authorities' refusal to meaningfully engage with these demands, together with subsequent attempts to

challenge or obstruct ONAT's collective action, including the introduction of an annulment action by the Tunis prosecutor against the extraordinary assembly of 1 May, raise serious concerns about deliberate interference with the legal profession's independent institutional role in defending judicial independence, fair trial guarantees and the rule of law. The Tunisian authorities' attempt to delegitimize, obstruct or retaliate against ONAT's mobilisation is therefore an attack on the legal profession's institutional role in defending judicial independence, fair trial guarantees and the rule of law.

According to Principle 14 of the [UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers \(UN Basic Principles\)](#), in protecting the rights of their clients and promoting the cause of justice, lawyers must seek to uphold human rights. They shall at all times act freely and diligently, in accordance with the law and recognized standards and ethics of the legal profession. Principle 23 protects lawyers' right to take part in public discussion on matters concerning the law, the administration of justice and the promotion and protection of human rights. Principles 24 and 25 recognise the role of self-governing professional associations of lawyers in protecting the professional integrity of their members and cooperating to ensure effective and equal access to legal services.

Lawyers are 'essential agents of justice' and by obstructing their work, the Tunisian authorities undermine the right to a fair trial and the rule of law. Lawyers, as other individuals, are entitled to the full range of human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to which Tunisia is a party.

Targeting lawyers for their professional duties

The attack on ONAT is part of a wider and systematic assault on lawyers who defend political opponents, journalists, judges, human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations. Lawyers in Tunisia have faced prosecution, arbitrary detention, travel bans, unfair trials and other forms of retaliation because of the cases they undertake and the clients they represent. Such assault violates not only the human rights of the lawyers, but also those of their clients, and have a serious chilling effect on the right to defence. This contravenes Principle 16 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of the Lawyers which requires governments to ensure that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference. It also violates Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects the right to access a legal representative of one's own choosing.

The case of **Ayachi Hammami** illustrates this pattern. He opposed measures taken by the President that undermine judicial independence and the rule of law, including the summary dismissal of judges and prosecutors in June 2022. Hammami was the spokesperson for the defence committee of the dismissed judges. In January 2023, he was charged under Decree-Law No. 54 based on statements he made to the media in his role as spokesperson. Hammami, a prominent lawyer and human rights defender, first acted as defence counsel in the so-called "conspiracy against state security" case. He was subsequently added to the list of suspects, charged, banned from travelling and from appearing in public places, and imprisoned to serve a five-year sentence. UN experts [considered](#) that his conviction was linked to his work defending those accused in the case and warned that prosecuting legal professionals for performing their duties threatens the integrity and fairness of legal proceedings in Tunisia.

Hammami is [among dozens of lawyers](#) facing judicial harassment and serious risk of reprisal for exercising their professional duties and right to freedom of expression. To date, 8 lawyers are [deprived of their liberty](#), including a former Bar President. Furthermore, 5 lawyers have been forced into exile and 12 lawyers are subject to judicial harassment. This includes:

- **Sonia Dahmani**, a lawyer and media commentator, who was [arrested](#) on 11 May 2024 at the premises of ONAT by masked security forces and subjected to five criminal proceedings under Presidential Decree-Law No. 54 for public statements on television and radio concerning prison conditions and racial discrimination. She was released on 27 November 2025 after 18 months in detention, but criminal proceedings against her remain pending. Since her release, she has received two further convictions: eighteen months on appeal in April 2026 for her statements on racism in Tunisia, and [two years](#) handed down on 25 May 2026 by the Tunis court of first instance for statements on prison conditions. Her lawyer has appealed the most recent judgment.
- **Chawki Tabib**, a lawyer, former President of the Tunis Bar Association and former head of the National Anti-Corruption Authority (INLUCC), has been subject to a travel ban since January 2024 and faces two sets of proceedings: the first, an ongoing judicial investigation into money laundering and related offences, which led to the [issuance of a pre-trial detention](#) order; and a second set of proceedings, recently concluded at first instance, which ended in his conviction on 21 May 2026 for forgery and use of forged documents, with a sentence of 10 years in prison. His assets were frozen by a decision dated 14 April 2026, and the Tunisian National Bar Association has noted that the detention order was issued without prior interrogation. International organisations have expressed concern about the politically motivated nature of these prosecutions.
- Lawyer **Dalila Msaddak**, currently subject to seven separate investigations under Decree-Law No. 54, all arising from her [work as defence counsel](#) in the conspiracy case and the exercise of her freedom of expression.

These cases illustrate the broader pattern of identifying lawyers with their clients or their clients' causes and attempting to silence the legal profession. In line with Principle 18 of the UN Basic Principles, lawyers must never be identified with their clients or their clients' causes. Nor may they be punished for the cases they take, the legal arguments they present, or their public defence of fair trial rights, judicial independence and human rights. The criminalisation of lawyers for carrying out their professional duties is a direct attack on the right to a defence and on the independence of the legal profession, which deters lawyers from taking on sensitive cases and risks leaving certain sectors of the population without legal representation, denying access to justice.

Reprisals against judges defending judicial independence

We also condemn the Tunisian authorities' reprisals against judges and magistrates' associations that have opposed executive interference in the judiciary. These recent measures are part of a broader process of dismantling the guarantees of judicial independence in Tunisia since 2022. On 12 February 2022, the President of the Republic dissolved the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) and replaced it with a Provisional Supreme Judicial Council (PSJC), whose composition and functioning remain largely under the control of the executive. This reform was followed by the summary dismissal of judges by presidential decree and by the growing subordination of the judiciary to the executive. Since 2023, the PSJC has itself been paralysed due to lack of quorum, as a result of the failure to appoint several ex officio members, leaving in practice the Ministry of Justice to manage judges' careers and discipline through informal mechanisms lacking a clear legal basis.

Judge Anas Hmedi, President of the Association of Tunisian Magistrates, has become a central target of this repression. Criminal proceedings against him stem from actions taken in his capacity as head of the association and from the judges' legitimate mobilisation against the summary dismissal of 57 judges by presidential decree in 2022. Following his trial proceedings "[plagued with irregularities](#)", Judge Hmedi was convicted and sentenced to one year in prison on charges of obstruction of work and risks imprisonment if the verdict is [confirmed on appeal](#). His prosecution and conviction contravene the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, including Principle 1, which requires states to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary, and Principles 8 and 9, which protect judges' rights to freedom of expression and association, respectively.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers has [described](#) the proceedings against Judge Hmedi as an "evident reprisal" for defending judicial independence, raising serious concerns about reprisals against judges who oppose executive interference in the justice system, the misuse of criminal law to silence them, and the message of intimidation that it sends to the entire judiciary and the public.

Repression of rights organisations and obstruction of access to justice

The authorities' growing repression campaign has also targeted independent civil society organisations, including organisations providing legal aid, monitoring human rights violations, defending women's human rights, opposing racism, protecting media freedom and supporting victims of abuse - activities that support access to justice and provide an essential check on abuses of power.

Over the past year, Tunisian courts have issued 30-day suspension orders against at least 25 organisations, including Avocats Sans Frontières, Mnemty, the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, Aswat Nissa, Nawaat, the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, the International Commission of Jurists, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), and the Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights, one of Africa's oldest human rights organisations and co-laureate of the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize as part of the National Dialogue Quartet. Mnemty's president, Saadia Mosbah, [remains arbitrarily detained](#). The organisations that [challenged](#) the suspension orders in court lost their appeals and now face the threat of dissolution.

These measures not only restrict the right to freedom of association but directly obstruct access to justice. The [suspension order](#) against Avocats Sans Frontières, issued on 5 May 2026, despite being subsequently lifted, has already affected the legal aid and judicial support provided to vulnerable individuals, human rights defenders, and political and conscience detainees, as well as ASF's capacity to monitor and denounce the instrumentalisation of justice and human rights violations. By targeting human rights organisations, legal aid providers and independent associations, the authorities are cutting off essential support for victims of police violence, gender-based violence, racial discrimination, political persecution and other human rights violations.

Taken together, such suspension of civil society organisations, the prosecution of lawyers, the reprisals against judges and the obstruction of ONAT collectively undermine the institutional safeguards that protect individuals against human rights violations.

Calls to the Tunisian authorities

The undersigned organisations call on the Tunisian authorities to:

1. Immediately end all acts of intimidation, harassment, wrongful prosecution, arbitrary detention, retaliation and improper interference targeting lawyers, judges, prosecutors, bar associations, ONAT, lawyers' associations, judges' associations and human rights defenders; and immediately and unconditionally release lawyers, human rights defenders and all others solely detained for exercising their human rights;
2. Fully and effectively guarantee that lawyers can carry out their professional duties freely and independently, including when representing detainees held for politically motivated reasons, journalists, judges, activists, opposition figures or victims of human rights violations, and ensure that they are not identified with their clients or punished for the cases they undertake, the clients they represent, or their clients causes, the legal arguments they present or their public defence of human rights and the rule of law;
3. Immediately drop all criminal, disciplinary and administrative proceedings brought against lawyers and judges solely for carrying out their professional duties, defending judicial independence, or exercising their human rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly;
4. Quash the conviction and sentencing of Judge Anas Hmedi and ensure that no judge is punished for defending judicial independence or for participating in the legitimate activities of a professional' association;
5. Immediately release Ayachi Hammami and Chawki Tabib and stop the arbitrary trials of lawyers, including Sonia Dahmani, Dalila Msaddak, and all lawyers, judges, political detainees, journalists, human rights defenders and civil society actors arbitrarily detained for exercising their human rights or carrying out legitimate professional work;
6. Lift suspension orders against civil society organisations and end all attempts to dissolve, obstruct or criminalise human rights groups, legal aid organisations and independent associations;
7. Reverse measures undermining judicial independence imposed since 2022, including executive interference in the judiciary, and comply with court rulings on the dismissed judges;
8. Ensure full respect for fair trial guarantees, due process, access to counsel, equality of arms and the independence of courts;
9. Bring Tunisian law and practice into conformity with Tunisia's obligations under international human rights law and relevant international standards on the independence and protection of lawyers and judges, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, and international standards on judicial independence and the independence of the legal profession;
10. Restore the independence of the legal profession and the judiciary, and guarantee the free and lawful work of civil society organisations and uphold the human rights of everyone in the country.

SIGNED:

- Amnesty International
- Avocats Sans Frontières
- Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (Conseil des Barreaux Européens, CCBE)
- Defense Commission - Barcelona Bar Association
- Deutscher Anwaltverein (German Bar Association)
- DSF-AS Défense Sans Frontières-Avocats Solidaires
- Euromed Rights
- European Association for Lawyers for Democracy and World Human Rights (ELDH)
- European Criminal Bar Association (ECBA)
- European Democratic Lawyers (AED)
- Foundation International Day of the Endangered Lawyer
- GeBehatokia, Basque Observatory of Human Rights
- Human Rights Watch
- Indian Association of Lawyers (IAL)
- Institute for the Rule of Law of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA-IROL)
- International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)
- International Association of Judges (IAJ-UIJM)
- International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)
- International Association of Russian Advocates
- International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Observatory for Lawyers at Risk (OIAD)
- L'Institut des droits humains du barreau de Bruxelles
- L'Observatoire des Avocats (<http://www.IDHBB.org>)
- Law Society of England and Wales
- Lawyers for Lawyers (L4L)
- Legal Centre Lesbos
- Medel -Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés, representing 24 associations of judges and prosecutors
- National Union of People's Lawyer (NUPL), Philippines
- New York City Bar Association
- Ordre des avocats de Genève (ODAGE)
- Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture (OMCT)
- PEN Norway
- Progressive Lawyers Association, Turkey (ÇHD)
- Republikanische Anwältinnen- und Anwälteverein (RAV)
- The Lawyers for the Rule of Law, USA
- The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)
- Union of Peoples' Lawyers in Mindanao
- Vereinigung Demokratischer Jurist:innen (VDJ), Germany