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Third UA: 2/22 Index: MDE 30/8033/2024 Tunisia of May 8, 2024

## **TUNISIA EX-MINISTER TO BE TRIED ON BOGUS CHARGES**

On April 16, 2024, the Criminal Chamber of the Tunis Court of Cassation upheld the indictment of Nouredine Bhiri. Bhiri is a former justice minister and senior leader of the Ennahdha party. He faces trial on charges of "trying to change the form of the government," under Article 72 of the penal code. This charge is punishable by death. The charges stem from a social media post that Bhiri has denied writing. An expert appointed by the accusation chamber confirmed the content of the post. Bhiri has been in pre-trial detention at Mornaguia prison since his arrest on February 13, 2023. The Tunisian authorities must immediately release Nouredine Bhiri and drop all politically motivated charges against him.

### **Write to the President of the Republic of Tunisia urging him to:**

- Immediately release Nouredine Bhiri and drop all bogus charges against him.
- Pending his release, ensure that he receives any medical treatment he may require and continue to allow him regular visits from his family and lawyers.
- Cease the targeted arrests of critics for the peaceful exercise of their human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly.

### **Write to:**

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Email: [contact@carthage.tn](mailto:contact@carthage.tn)

X: @TnPresidency

Salutation: *Your Excellency:*

### **And copy:**

His Excellency Lassaad BOUTARA

Ambassador

Embassy of the Republic of Tunisia

515 O'Connor Street

Ottawa, ON K1S 3P8

Tel: (613) 237-0330, -0332 Fax: (613) 237-7939

Email: [at.ottawa@diplomatie.gov.tn](mailto:at.ottawa@diplomatie.gov.tn)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Nouredine Bhiri, aged 64, is a prominent member of Ennahdha and served as Tunisia's Minister of Justice from 2011 to 2013. He was part of the coalition government formed after the removal of long-time ruler Zine el Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. Bhiri is also a practicing lawyer and a standing member of the Tunisian Bar Association. He previously held the position of vice-president of Ennahdha, which was the main political party in Tunisia with a parliamentary majority before President

Kais Saied suspended it on July 25, 2021. Saied invoked emergency powers under Article 80 of the Constitution, a move Ennahdha has labeled a coup.

Bhiri was arrested on February 13, 2023, due to critical remarks allegedly made on his private Facebook page on January 8, 2023, during a National Salvation Front-organized demonstration. His defense team shared a copy of the post with Amnesty International, in which he advocated for "peaceful resistance against the coup" and encouraged leadership against fear. Bhiri has denied authoring the post, which is no longer available online but is protected under international human rights law.

Currently, Bhiri is detained in Mornaguia prison, facing charges of "trying to change the form of government" and "inciting violence" under Article 72 of the Penal Code, charges that could lead to the death penalty. His health is precarious due to diabetes and high blood pressure, conditions that require regular medication.

Bhiri's arrest and house arrest on December 31, 2021, alongside Fathi Beldi, a former Interior Ministry official, mark [previous instances of arbitrary detention](#). Both were initially held at undisclosed locations by men in civilian clothing and later placed under house arrest. Their house arrest was lifted on March 7, 2022, without any formal charges being filed.

Since asserting emergency powers on July 25, 2021, President Saied's administration has launched criminal investigations against at least 74 opposition figures and others viewed as threats to his rule. This includes at least 44 people charged in relation to the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

***Please take action as soon as possible until July 3, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***