

Urgent Action Office 3-1992 Yonge Street Toronto ON M4S 1Z7 Phone: (416) 363-9933 Fax: (416) 363-3103 urgentaction@amnesty.ca
First UA: 43/24 Index: MDE 30/8054/2024 Tunisia of May 16, 2024

TUNISIA

LAWYER, SONIA DAHMANI ARRESTED FOR TV REMARKS

On May 11, 2024, masked security forces in civilian clothing stormed the Bar Association offices in Tunis to arrest lawyer and media personality Sonia Dahmani. Two days later, an investigative judge in the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered her detention over critical remarks she made on a TV show. Sonia is accused of spreading false information under the harsh cybercrimes Decree-Law. This law carries a five-year prison sentence and a fine of 50,000 dinars (about 21,788 CAD).

Sonia Dahmani is now arbitrarily detained in Manouba prison in Tunis. Her next hearing is scheduled for May 20. We urge the Tunisian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Sonia Dahmani. She is detained solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression. The criminal investigation against her must be dropped.

Write to the President of the Republic of Tunisia urging the government to:

- Ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Sonia Dahmani and that the baseless criminal investigation against her is dropped.
- Cease the targeted arrests of critics for the peaceful exercise of their human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association.

Write to:

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Email: 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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer and a prominent media personality. She frequently appears on radio and TV shows like "Emission Impossible" on IFM Radio and "Denya Zida" on Carthage+. On May 7, 2024, she publicly criticized the migration situation in Tunisia during a TV show, questioning the country's condition as many young people want to leave.

On May 9, Sonia announced she had been summoned by an investigative judge. She was being investigated under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54, which mandates five years in jail and a fine of 50,000 Dinars (around 16,000 USD) for disseminating "fake news" or false information. On May 10, Sonia refused to attend her hearing since she had not been informed of the reason for her summons. The judge refused to postpone and issued a warrant for her arrest. On May 11, security forces raided the Tunisian Bar Association's offices and violently arrested Sonia.

Sonia is also facing investigations in two other cases for public comments critical of the authorities. In November 2023, she was summoned following a complaint by the General Directorate of Prisons for her remarks about prison conditions. In January 2024, she faced [another complaint](#) from Minister of Justice Laila Jaffel. After Sonia's arrest, two journalists who appeared on the same radio show were also detained. They are [under investigation](#) for their critical remarks against the authorities. On May 13, representatives of IFM, Diwan FM, and Carthage+ were summoned for questioning about their journalists' work.

The National Order of Lawyers (ONAT) announced a strike on May 13 to protest Sonia's arbitrary arrest. The [French authorities and the European Union](#) have expressed concerns about the wave of arrests targeting civil society members and journalists. Since Decree-Law 54 was enacted on September 13, 2022, authorities have increasingly targeted individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression. At least 22 individuals, including lawyers, journalists, bloggers, and political activists, have been prosecuted or sentenced for comments critical of the authorities.

Decree-Law 54 violates human rights treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Tunisia is a state party. Since his power grab on July 25, 2021, President Saied has claimed emergency powers, leading to a [deteriorating human rights situation](#). The crackdown on opposition figures and critics is a direct attack on the rule of law and fundamental rights like freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Please take action as soon as possible until July 11, 2024! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.