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Second UA: 76/24 Index: MDE 30/8982/2025 Tunisia of January 28, 2025

## TUNISIA FREE SIHEM BENSEDRINE: END UNJUST DETENTION NOW

On January 14, the 14th anniversary of the Tunisian revolution, human rights defender Sihem Bensedrine began a hunger strike to protest her arbitrary detention. She has been jailed since August 2024 simply for exercising her rights.

By January 26, her health worsened, and she was hospitalized. Two days later, on January 28, her lawyers learned that a Tunisian judge extended her pre-trial detention by four more months. She faces charges of “fraud,” “forgery,” and “abuse of official capacity” for exposing alleged corruption as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD).

Authorities must release Sihem Bensedrine immediately and unconditionally. All charges against her must be dropped. The criminal justice system should not be used to silence those who fight for truth and justice.

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

- Immediately and unconditionally release Sihem Bensedrine and drop all charges against her.
- End the misuse of the criminal justice system to target and silence her.
- Ensure her well-being and fair treatment until her release.
- Grant her access to qualified health professionals who follow medical ethics, including confidentiality, autonomy, and informed consent.
- Ensure she has regular contact with her family and lawyers and that she is held in conditions that meet international standards.

### Write to:

President of the Republic Kais Saied  
Route de la Goulette  
Site archéologique de Carthage, Tunisie  
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: [tunisianembassyCanada@diplomatie.gov.tn](mailto:tunisianembassyCanada@diplomatie.gov.tn)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Sihem Bensedrine, 74, is a well-known human rights defender and journalist. Under former President Ben Ali, she exposed government abuses and faced persecution. After his removal on January 14, 2011, she continued her work, advocating for justice and transparency. Since President Kaies Saied's power grab in July 2021, she has been an outspoken critic of actions undermining judicial independence and the rule of law.

Since starting her hunger strike, Bensedrine's health has rapidly worsened. She suffers from weakness and low oxygen levels, requiring respiratory assistance in the prison infirmary. On January 26, her condition deteriorated further, and she was transferred to a hospital outside the prison. Her pre-existing health issues, including high blood pressure and heart problems, make her especially vulnerable.

From 2014 to 2018, Bensedrine led Tunisia's Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD), which investigated human rights violations and corruption from 1955 to 2013. The IVD had the authority to refer serious cases to specialized criminal chambers. By December 2018, it had transferred 205 cases for prosecution, including corruption cases involving former ministers, business leaders, and government officials.

Despite resistance from Parliament, the IVD extended its mandate until the end of 2018. On December 28, 2018, the Presidency informed the IVD that its final report was due in three days. To meet the deadline, the IVD board adopted a preliminary report on December 30, pending revisions. The final version was published on the IVD website on March 26, 2019, and in the Official Gazette on June 24, 2020. Throughout its work, the IVD faced opposition, with government agencies refusing to cooperate fully.

In May 2020, a former IVD commissioner accused Bensedrine of altering the final report to include details about corruption in Tunisia's banking sector. The complaint claimed she did this for personal gain, as it could lead to costly reparations for the government. In March 2021, the case was referred to the Tunis General Prosecution, and by late 2021, the judicial police launched an investigation, summoning IVD members for questioning.

Authorities accused Bensedrine of forgery and harming the Tunisian state by adding revisions to the corruption section. Initially questioned as a witness in November 2022, she was later reclassified as a suspect. In March 2023, a judge imposed a travel ban on her. On August 1, 2024, a court ordered her pre-trial detention on the same charges, despite a lack of evidence.

The case against Bensedrine appears to be a retaliation for her work with the IVD, particularly its corruption cases and final report. The prosecution has failed to provide concrete evidence of criminal wrongdoing. In May 2023, UN human rights experts expressed concern that her prosecution was politically motivated.

International standards require states to uphold the right to truth about human rights violations. They also protect truth commission members from retaliation, including legal action related to their work. Bensedrine's prosecution violates these principles and undermines efforts to hold human rights violators accountable.

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***Please take action as soon as possible until June 28, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***