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Fourth UA: 52/23 Index: MDE 30/9250/2025 Tunisia of April 10, 2025

TUNISIA

TUNISIA PUTS PEACEFUL ACTIVISTS ON TRIAL

On March 4, 2025, a mass trial began in Tunisia for 40 people—including political opposition leaders, lawyers, and human rights defenders. They are facing baseless “conspiracy” charges simply for speaking out.

Six of the accused have already spent more than two years in unjust pre-trial detention. Among them are well-known political figures: Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, Khayyam Turki, Issam Chebbi, Ghazi Chaouachi, Ridha Belhaj, and Abdelhamid Jelassi. They’ve been locked up since February 2023.

The authorities are accusing them of trying to “change the nature of the state” under Article 72 of the Penal Code—a charge that carries the death penalty. Tunisia’s anti-terrorism court is handling the case.

After the first hearing, held remotely, the judge postponed the trial to April 11, 2025. The court ignored key requests from defense lawyers, including calls to release the detainees and allow them to appear in person.

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

- Immediately release Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, Khayyam Turki, Issam Chebbi, Ghazi Chaouachi, Ridha Belhaj, and Abdelhamid Jelassi, as they are detained solely for peacefully exercising their human rights.
- Drop all unfounded charges against all defendants in this case.
- Lift arbitrary travel bans and other restrictions that violate their rights.

Write to:

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Email: contact@carthage.tn

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

Twitter/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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On March 4, 2025, Tunisia opened a mass trial against at least 40 people—political opposition figures, lawyers, businesspeople, and human rights defenders from across the political spectrum. They are all accused of being part of a so-called “conspiracy.” These charges are unfounded and appear to be politically motivated.

The investigation began in February 2023 and ended in April 2024, when charges were confirmed. Among the accused are members of the opposition Nahdha party—Noureddine Bhiri, Sahbi Atig, Said Ferjani, and Riadh Chaibi—along with opposition leader Nejib Chebbi of the Salvation Front, independent activist Mohamed Hamdi, and well-known human rights defenders such as Kamel Jendoubi, Ayachi Hammami, and Bochra Bel Haj Hmida. Businesspeople, including private media shareholders, are also on trial.

Six defendants have been held in pre-trial detention since February 2023: Khayyam Turki (arrested February 11); Abdelhamid Jelassi (February 12); Issam Chebbi (February 22); Jaouhar Ben Mbarek (February 24); and Ghazi Chaouachi and Ridha Belhaj (February 25).

Opposition figure Chaima Issa and activist Lazhar Akremi were also arrested in February 2023, detained for nearly five months, and released on July 13, 2023. However, both remain under travel bans and are barred from appearing in public.

The accused face a wide range of charges under both Tunisia’s Penal Code and counterterrorism laws. This includes Article 72, which allows for the death penalty for attempts to “change the nature of the state,” and Article 32 of the 2015 counterterrorism law, which carries up to 20 years in prison for “forming a terrorist organization.”

Judges and the Tunis Court of Appeals have repeatedly denied defense requests to release the detainees. Authorities claim detention is needed to “protect the integrity of the investigation.” Meanwhile, new charges have been brought against those involved in the case simply for speaking out. For instance, [human rights lawyer Ayachi Hammami](#)—who represents several of the accused—is now a defendant himself. Lawyers Dalila Msaddek Ben Mbarek and Islam Hamza, both part of the legal defense team, are being investigated under [the repressive Decree-Law 54](#) for allegedly “spreading false news” during radio interviews.

[Since the investigation began](#), judicial authorities have summoned at least 42 additional individuals—activists, lawyers, former MPs, businesspeople, human rights defenders, and ex-security officials—for questioning in connection with this case.

This crackdown has sparked serious concern among international human rights bodies. On February 14, 2023, [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk](#) raised alarms about the arrests and Tunisia’s continued attacks on judicial independence. A UN spokesperson called for the release of all those arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their rights.

On February 22, 2023, President Kais Saied publicly denounced anyone who supported the accused, labeling them as “accomplices.” This statement followed his 2022 [dismissal of 57 judges](#), deepening fears of judicial intimidation and political interference.

On October 8, 2024, [the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention declared](#) - that Tunisia had violated the due process rights of the eight detained individuals, and that their detention is arbitrary and unlawful.

Please take action as soon as possible until July 10, 2025. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.