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Second UA: 45/25 Index: MDE 30/0468/2025 Tunisia of November 10, 2025

TUNISIA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS MUST BE FREED

On November 24, 2025, six people, including human rights defenders Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi, will stand trial before the Tunis Court of First Instance.

Mustapha Djemali is the founder and director of the Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR). Abderrazek Krimi is a project manager with the same organization. Both have been held in arbitrary pre-trial detention since May 2024. They were arrested only because of their legitimate human rights work and for exercising their right to freedom of association.

The CTR, a Tunisian organization that works with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), provides vital support to refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia.

Tunisian authorities must immediately release Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi and drop all charges against them. They must also ensure that human rights defenders can continue their work freely and safely, without fear of reprisals.

Write to President of Tunisia urging the government to:

- Ensure the immediate release of Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi.
- Drop all charges against them.
- Stop targeting and arresting human rights defenders.
- Guarantee that human rights defenders can do their work freely and safely, without fear of reprisals.

Write to:

President of the Republic Kais Saied
Route de la Goulette
Site archéologique de Carthage, Tunisie
Email: contact@carthage.tn
Twitter: @TnPresidency – Facebook
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: tunisianembassy canada@diplomatie.gov.tn

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In early May 2024, the Tunisian government began a sweeping crackdown on refugees, migrants, and the organizations defending their rights.

On May 6, President Kais Saied made public remarks attacking groups working on migration issues. He accused them of trying to “settle” migrants in Tunisia and called them “traitors” and “foreign agents.” He claimed that “networks inside” Tunisia were linked to “networks abroad” and receiving money under the false claim of protecting migrants.

The next day, a Tunis prosecutor opened an investigation into associations accused of “abusing their mandate to provide financial support” to irregular migrants.

Since then, authorities have summoned, arrested, and investigated leaders, staff, and members of at least 20 organizations. Ten human rights defenders, NGO workers, and local officials have been placed in arbitrary pre-trial detention on accusations of supporting irregular migrants or misusing NGO funds.

That same month, the government carried out forced evictions of refugees and migrants. Some landlords were convicted for renting apartments to people without regular status.

These actions mark one of the most severe escalations against refugee and migrant rights in Tunisia since February 2023. They are part of a broader pattern of racially discriminatory language and practices. Similar efforts to criminalize refugee and migrant rights defenders have also been observed in Europe and beyond.

The Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR), founded in 2016, was one of the first groups targeted. The CTR works with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and Tunisian authorities to pre-register asylum seekers and provide essential support to refugees in need.

Its founder, Mustapha Djemali, is a former senior UNHCR official. On May 2, 2024, the CTR published a public tender for hotel accommodations to shelter refugees and asylum seekers in vulnerable situations. This was a routine part of its work and done in response to a request from the UNHCR and the region of Sfax.

Soon after, Tunisian media outlets and social media users spread screenshots of the tender. They accused civil society of conspiring to “settle” Africans or “illegal migrants” in Tunisia, using racist and xenophobic language.

On May 3, police raided the CTR office in Tunis and arrested Mustapha Djemali. The next day, they arrested Abderrazek Krimi, the CTR project manager.

Police questioned them about the organization’s funding, its support for irregular migrants, and the call for tenders. Following their arrests, the CTR suspended its activities. This led to serious disruptions in access to asylum procedures and essential services, including health care, shelter, and child protection.

On May 7, 2024, an investigating judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered six months of pre-trial detention for both defenders. They were charged with *“forming an alliance or organization”* to *“plan, assist, or organize”* the irregular entry of people into Tunisia and with *“providing them shelter.”*

These charges are vague and unfounded. They do not include any evidence of material gain or exploitation; the elements that define human smuggling and trafficking under international law.

The judge extended their detention in October 2024 and again in February 2025, which should be the final extension allowed by law. Despite several requests, the court has rejected conditional release. Authorities also froze the personal bank accounts of both defenders and the CTR.

An independent expert report submitted in March 2025 found no financial irregularities. Yet, during a hearing on March 25, the judge told the defenders, *“You brought Black people into Tunisia illegally and you feed and shelter them. Tunisian history and laws will make you pay for it.”* This statement raises serious concerns about bias and fairness in the proceedings.

On April 30, 2025, the investigation was closed. On June 3, 2025, the indictment chamber decided to send the case to trial.

Please take action as soon as possible until May 10, 2026. The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.