

URGENT ACTION

MASS CONVICTIONS OF OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS

On April 19, 2025, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced 37 individuals, including prominent political opposition figures, lawyers, human rights defenders, and activists, to harsh prison terms, ranging from 4 to 74 years, after a sham trial. The court convicted them of conspiracy against state security and terrorism charges based on unsubstantiated charges related to their meetings to organize political opposition efforts, as well as meetings with foreign citizens, including diplomats. The process was marred by violations of fair trial and due process rights. Tunisian authorities should quash the unjust convictions and sentences of all defendants and immediately and unconditionally release all those who are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights in relation to the “conspiracy case”.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- [Click here](#) to report your action(s) on **Fifth UA 52.23**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Email: contact@carthage.tn

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

Twitter/X: @TnPresidency

Send a copy of your letter to the address below

**CC: Tunisian Embassy in the United States
Ambassador Hanene Al-Tajouri Bessassi**

1515 Massachusetts Avenue, NW,
Washington DC 20005

Email: AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org

Your Excellency,

I write to express my grave concern following the unjust sentencing of **37 individuals** to harsh prison sentences of up to 74 years following a sham trial on bogus charges of “conspiracy” in relation to their legitimate political activities or affiliations.

Among the 37 individuals sentenced six opposition political figures – **Jaouhar Ben Mbarek**, **Khayyam Turki**, **Issam Chebbi**, **Ghazi Chaouachi**, **Ridha Belhaj**, and **Abdelhamid Jelassi** – and businessman, **Kamel Ltaief**, have been in arbitrary detention since their arrest in February 2023. The rest of the defendants have also been sentenced, including several individuals already detained in relation to other politically motivated cases — such as senior opposition figures, **Nouredine Bhiri**, **Sahbi Atig**, and **Said Ferjani** from the former ruling Nahdha party. The case also targets prominent human rights activists, **Ayachi Hammami** and **Bochra Bel Haj Hmida**, as well as businessmen and private media shareholders who were convicted and sentenced but remain free or in exile.

Their trial was marred by egregious fair trial violations, including the physical absence of defendants in the courtroom.

I therefore urge you to quash the unjust convictions and sentences of all defendants and to immediately and unconditionally release those who are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights. Finally, I urge you to cease the politically motivated prosecutions of critics, political opponents, human rights defenders, and activists.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On March 4, the trial in the “conspiracy case” opened against 40 people including political opposition activists from across the political spectrum, businessman, lawyers, human rights defenders, and activists over two years after the investigation started in February 2023. The defendants were prosecuted based on unfounded charges of conspiracy under 10 provisions of the Tunisian Penal Code including Article 72, which mandates the death penalty for trying to “change the nature of the state.” They also face several charges under 17 provisions of the 2015 counterterrorism law including Article 32, which mandates up to 20 years of imprisonment for “forming a terrorist organization”. The indictments were based solely on the defendants’ involvement in organizing political opposition or meetings including with foreign nationals — none of which constitutes a criminal offense.

Authorities have arbitrarily detained eight of the defendants in pre-trial detention since their arrest in February 2023 exceeding the legal limit of 14 months set out in the Code of Criminal Procedure: including politician **Khayyam Turki**, businessman **Kamel Ltaief** arrested on February 11; politician **Abdelhamid Jelassi** arrested on February 12; opposition activist **Issam Chebbi** arrested on February 22; opposition activist **Jaouhar Ben Mbarek** arrested on February 24; and finally, lawyers and political activists **Ghazi Chaouachi** and **Ridha Belhaj** arrested on February 25. Security forces arrested **Chaima Issa** and **Lazhar Akremi** in February 2023, but they were provisionally released on July 13, 2023, after nearly five months of arbitrary detention.

The trial, plagued by procedural shortcomings and due process violations, began on March 4, 2025, without the defendants present. It was subsequently postponed to April 11 and then 18. In advance, the court informed the Bar Association that all terrorism trials in March and April would proceed with detainees appearing remotely from prison, vaguely citing a “real danger” as justification. This measure was challenged by both the detainees and their legal teams, who asserted their right to appear in person. The detainees refused to participate in the proceedings unless physically present in the courtroom. The trial was further undermined by a lack of transparency. Evidence was neither publicly presented nor subjected to cross-examination, and access to the courtroom was denied to several independent journalists, civil society representatives, and members of the diplomatic community. The defendants’ lawyers were not given the opportunity to present their arguments before the court delivered its verdicts.

On April 24, 2025, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, [called the verdict a setback to justice and the rule of law](#). Turk had previously expressed concerns over the arrests of political opposition figures in relation to conspiracy charges in [February 2023](#). On February 22, 2023, President Saïed [declared](#) that anyone who “dared to exonerate” what he described as “criminal networks” was, in essence, an “accomplice.” This statement, coupled with the president’s [arbitrary dismissal](#) of 57 judges in 2022, has contributed to a growing climate of intimidation of the judiciary.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French, English, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: November 27, 2025

NAME AND PRONOUN: Group UA

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-mass-trial-of-political-dissidents-opens-tunisia-fourth-ua-52-23/>