

# URGENT ACTION

## HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS UNJUSTLY HELD

In early May 2024, Tunisian authorities arrested refugee rights defenders, Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi, from the Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR), a reputable local organization working in partnership with the UN Refugee Agency and ordered their pre-trial detention as part of a broader crackdown on organizations supporting refugees and migrants. They questioned them solely in relation to their legitimate work defending the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Tunisian authorities must immediately release them, drop all charges against them, and ensure that human rights defenders are able to work in a safe and enabling environment without reprisal.

### 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 **UA 45.25**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

#### President of the Republic Kais Saied

Route de la Goulette  
Site archéologique de Carthage, Tunisie  
Email: [contact@carthage.tn](mailto:contact@carthage.tn)  
Twitter: @TnPresidency  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Presidence.tn>

*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](mailto:AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org)

Your Excellency,

I write to you to express my grave concern over the prolonged detention of human rights defenders, **Mustapha Djemali** and **Abderrazek Krimi**.

The charges for their detention are solely based on their legitimate work at the Tunisian Council of Refugees (Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés – CTR). Their detention is arbitrary as defending refugee and migrant rights is not a legitimate offense under international law and should never be equated with human smuggling or trafficking, in line with the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Trafficking and Smuggling Protocols ratified by Tunisia.

Tunisia is a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention which gives refugees the right to identity and travel documents, work, housing, education and relief, and protection from sanction for irregular entry. Following their arrest, the CTR suspended its activities, triggering critical disruptions in access to asylum procedures and basic services including health assistance, shelter, and child protection.

I urge you to ensure that authorities drop all charges against Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi and immediately release them. Pending this, I urge you to ensure that authorities provide them with access to the medication they require urgently. I also call on your government to cease targeted arrests of human rights defenders and allow them to operate in a safe and enabling environment without reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

In early May 2024, the Tunisian government launched a [clampdown](#) against refugees and migrants and civil society organizations defending their rights. On May 6, in [public remarks](#), President Kais Saied attacked organizations working on migration, accusing them of seeking the "settlement" of migrants and describing them as "traitors" and "[foreign] agents".

On May 7, a Tunis prosecutor [announced](#) the opening of an investigation against associations for "abusing their mandate to provide financial support" to irregular migrants. That same month, the authorities conducted forced evictions of refugees and migrants and convicted landlords for renting apartments to irregular migrants. This crackdown represented one of the latest escalations within [a wider deterioration](#) of refugee and migrant rights since [February 2023](#), marked by racially discriminatory practices and language. This pattern of criminalization of refugee and migrant rights defenders has also been documented in [Europe](#) and [beyond](#).

The Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR), a Tunisian NGO founded in 2016, which worked with the UNHCR and Tunisian authorities to pre-register asylum seekers and provide essential assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, was among the first organizations targeted. Its founder **Mustapha Djemali** is a former high-level UNHCR official. On May 2, 2024, in line with local compliance requirements and as part of their regular activities, the CTR published a tender for hotels to shelter asylum seekers and refugees in precarious situations, following a request for assistance from the UNHCR and the region of Sfax. Following its publication, Tunisian media outlets and social media accounts shared screenshots of the tender claiming that civil society was conspiring for the "settlement" of "Africans" or "illegal migrants" in Tunisia, often using xenophobic and racist language. On May 3, the police raided the CTR office in Tunis and arrested its director Mustapha Djemali. On May 4, the police arrested **Abderrazek Krimi**, project manager at the CTR.

On May 7, an investigating judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered their pre-trial detention for six months pending investigation. These charges lacking legal clarity fail to include elements of financial or material gain or exploitation which characterize human smuggling and trafficking and do not exempt human rights and humanitarian support, as required by the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Trafficking and Smuggling Protocols. On March 18, 2025, an expert report mandated by the judge to investigate their personal bank accounts and the account of the CTR was submitted to the court; it did not identify any irregularities. On March 25, the judge stated during an investigation hearing session "You brought Black people into Tunisia illegally and you feed and shelter them, Tunisian history and laws will make you pay for it," raising concerns as to his impartiality and the defendants' right to a fair trial.

Mustapha Djemali, 80, suffers from Horton's disease which requires medication without which he risks health complications. Since September 2024, prison authorities have failed to provide him with his medication despite multiple requests and have not allowed his family to bring him the medication. Prison authorities have also failed to provide Abderrazek Krimi with his required medical prescription.

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

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** November 10, 2025

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi (both he/him).