

URGENT ACTION

PROMINENT JOURNALIST UNJUSTLY IMPRISONED

On May 7, 2026, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced prominent Tunisian journalist and political commentator, Zied El Heni, to one year in prison solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Arrested on April 24, 2026, he was held in pretrial detention before being convicted under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code for comments criticizing a judicial decision. On June 26, 2026, the Tunis Court of Appeal upheld Zied El Heni's one-year prison sentence. His conviction is part of an escalating crackdown on journalists and other critical voices in Tunisia. The Tunisian authorities must immediately and unconditionally release him, quash his conviction, and end the use of criminal laws to punish people for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

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 68.26**. 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/
Twitter: @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 am concerned about the arbitrary arrest, unjust conviction, and imprisonment of prominent journalist, **Zied El Heni**, for comments protected under the right to freedom of expression. On May 7, 2026, Zied El Heni was sentenced to one year in prison under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code. The prosecution was based on remarks Zied El Heni made during a university seminar in which he criticized the judicial handling of the case of imprisoned journalist, **Khalifa Guesmi**. He later published a [recording](#) of the seminar on the website and YouTube channel of his independent media outlet, Tunisian Press, and shared it on his personal social media accounts. He was arrested on April 24, 2026, and held in pretrial detention. His prosecution and imprisonment stem solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

The imprisonment of journalists for their opinions or reporting violates Tunisia's obligations under international and regional human rights law, including Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) has affirmed that imprisonment for defamation and other forms of peaceful expression is a disproportionate restriction on this right and has called on states to repeal laws that criminalize legitimate journalistic activity and criticism of public officials.

I urge you to ensure that Zied El Heni is immediately and unconditionally released and that his conviction is quashed. I also call on the Tunisian authorities to end the use of criminal laws, including Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code, to prosecute journalists and other individuals simply for expressing their views.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zied El-Heni, 62, is a prominent journalist and political commentator on a daily morning radio show on the independent station IFM. He has repeatedly [faced prosecution](#) in recent years for comments critical of public officials and state institutions. He was summoned by police on December 28, 2023, shortly after criticizing the Minister of Commerce's performance on air. The same day, the General Prosecutor of the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered his detention under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 on Combating Crimes Related to Information and Communication Systems, which criminalizes the online dissemination of broadly defined "false" information deemed harmful to individuals or public interests, prescribing penalties of up to five years in prison and substantial fines. He was subsequently charged under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code and held in pretrial detention. On January 10, 2024, he was sentenced to a six-months suspended prison sentence and released.

In a separate case, Zied El Heni is also currently under investigation in connection with allegations relating to his role as a member of the municipal council in Carthage, a suburb of Tunis. On June 10, 2026, an investigating judge ordered the detention of five individuals, including Zied El Heni, pending investigations into the case.

On April 13, 2026, Zied El Heni filed a case before the Administrative Court against the Presidency of the Republic, requesting that the court order President Kais Saied to establish the Constitutional Court and reactivate the Supreme Judicial Council and the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HAICA). These institutions play a crucial role in ensuring constitutional oversight, judicial independence, and the protection of media freedom in Tunisia.

The prosecution of Zied El Heni is part of a broader crackdown on freedom of expression in Tunisia, since President Kais Saied's power grab in July 2022. Lawyers, journalists, bloggers, and political activists have been questioned, prosecuted, or sentenced for public comments perceived as critical of the authorities, including on the basis of [Decree-Law 2022-54](#) or the Telecommunications law and in most cases following governmental complaints. Among them is **Sonia Dahmani**, who spent 18 months in arbitrary detention and continues to face several prosecutions under Decree-Law 54. Prominent journalists, **Borhen Bsaies** and **Mourad Zeghidi**, were sentenced to one year in prison in 2024 under the same decree and, in January 2026, received additional prison sentences on financial charges. Independent media outlets have also faced increasing pressure, including the questioning of representatives of IFM, Diwan FM, and Carthage+ by judicial authorities in May 2024.

[Decree-Law 54](#), adopted on September 13, 2022, has been widely criticized for criminalizing expression through ambiguous and overly broad provisions, notably those relating to the dissemination of "false information". Such restrictions are incompatible with Tunisia's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which require any limitations on freedom of expression to comply with the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: December 1, 2026

NAME AND PRONOUN: Zied El Heni (He/Him)