URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST SENTENCED TO FOUR YEARS IN PRISON

On October 27, 2026, a Tunisian criminal court sentenced prominent journalist and political commentator, Zied El Heni, to four years in prison in relation to his journalistic work, followed by five years of administrative surveillance. The hearing was conducted remotely despite his written request to appear in person. According to his family, hearing difficulties compounded by technical problems prevented him from effectively participating in the proceedings, in violation of his defense rights. Zied El Heni is already serving a separate one-year prison sentence solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. He must be immediately and unconditionally released and all convictions stemming from his legitimate journalistic activities must be quashed.

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 ***Third UA 68.28***. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

President of the Republic Kais Saied
Email: contact@carthage.tn
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 am concerned about the latest conviction and continued imprisonment of Tunisian journalist, **Zied El Heni**, sentenced on October 27, 2026 by the criminal chamber specializing in terrorism cases at the Tunis Court of First Instance to four years in prison and an additional five years of administrative surveillance on unfounded terrorism-related charges stemming from his journalistic activities.

The case stems from Zied El Heni's reporting in September 2023 on leaked audio recordings attributed to journalist **Chahrazad Akacha** and **Mondher Lounissi**, then acting president of the opposition Ennahda party. The recordings concerned internal divisions within Ennahda, its leadership, and other political matters. Zied El Heni contacted Akacha and Lounissi to verify the recordings' authenticity and the information they contained before reporting on them. The investigating judge cited these contacts and exchanges of information as evidence supporting terrorism-related charges. However, the activities attributed to him fall within legitimate journalistic work.

I am also concerned about the violations of his right to a fair trial. The court conducted the hearing remotely despite his written request to appear in person because his hearing difficulties and the poor audio transmission during previous hearings had prevented him from following the proceedings.

I urge you to ensure Zied El Heni's immediate and unconditional release, quash both convictions, and lift the five-year administrative surveillance measure. I further call on you to drop all remaining charges against him stemming solely from his legitimate journalistic work and to end the misuse of criminal and counter-terrorism legislation to punish the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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. Moreover, Zied El Heni is already serving a separate one-year prison sentence under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

The terrorism-related case dates back to September 2023, following the circulation of leaked audio recordings. Zied El Heni discussed the recordings during a radio program on September 7 and explained that, as part of his journalistic work, he had contacted the individuals concerned to verify the information. On September 16, 2023, the National Anti-Terrorism Unit questioned him, initially as a witness. Investigators sought access to his phone and information about his sources. He refused and requested judicial authorization before handing over his phone, citing his duty to protect the confidentiality of journalistic sources. Judicial authorization was subsequently obtained and his status in the investigation was changed from witness to suspect. The case involves 12 defendants and includes charges under Tunisia's 2015 counter-terrorism law and the Penal Code. Amnesty International has reviewed the 2024 order closing the investigation, and found that Zied El Heni faces charges under Articles 1, 13, 32, 34, 37 and 40 of Organic Law No. 2015-26 on combating terrorism and preventing money laundering, in conjunction with Articles 32 and 60 of the Penal Code. Some of the offenses for which Zied El Heni is being prosecuted carry prison sentences of up to 20 years.

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. On June 10, 2026, an investigating judge ordered the detention of five individuals, including Zied El Heni, pending investigations. 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).

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. 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+.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: May 19, 2027

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

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/tunisia-journalist-on-trial-on-terrorsim-charges/