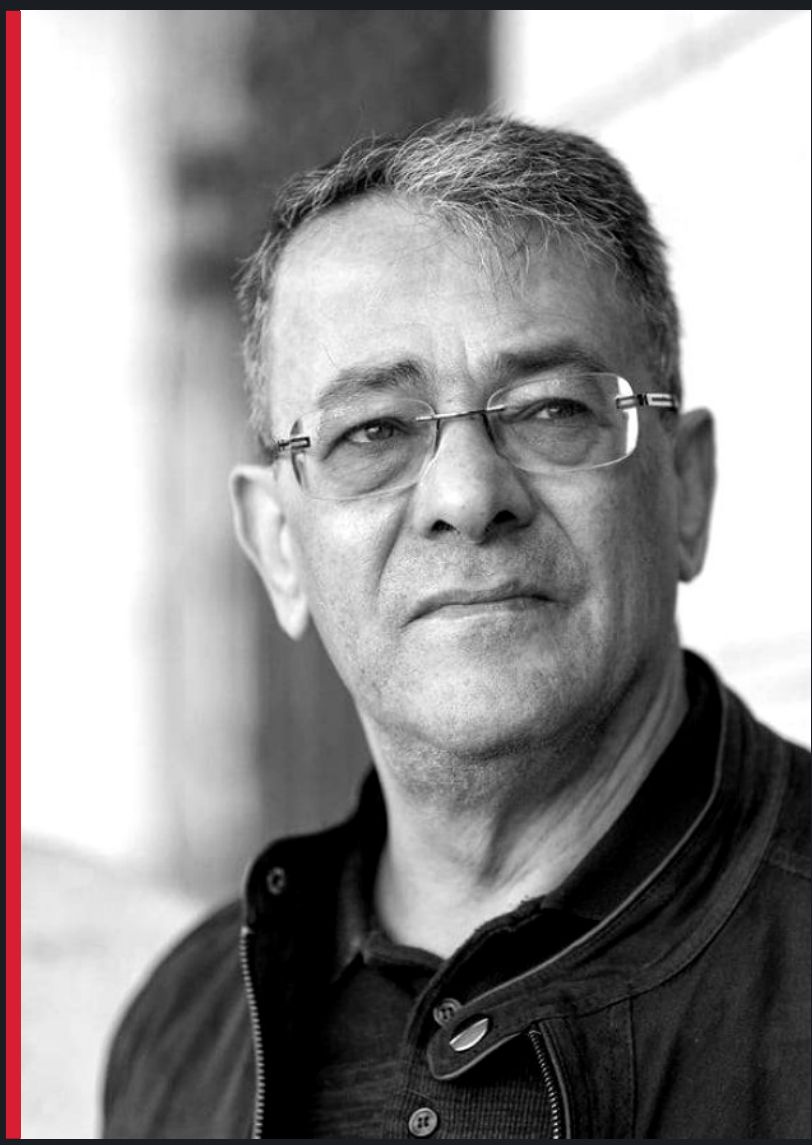

Advocacy dossier

Ahmed Souab

أحمد صواب

At liberty **Tunisia**

Ahmed Souab, a lawyer and former Administrative Court judge, was arrested in Tunisia in April 2025 and sentenced to five years in prison on terrorism and false information charges. On 23 February 2026 the Tunis Court of Appeal cut the sentence to ten months, already served, and two years suspended, and annulled the administrative supervision; he was released that day.

01
The case at a glance

Ahmed Souab, a lawyer and former Administrative Court judge, was arrested in Tunisia in April 2025 and sentenced to five years in prison on terrorism and false information charges. On 23 February 2026 the Tunis Court of Appeal cut the sentence to ten months, already served, and two years suspended, and annulled the administrative supervision; he was released that day.

Status **At liberty**	Arrested **21 Apr 2025**	Country **Tunisia**

Sentence Five years in prison and three years of administrative supervision at first instance (31 October 2025); reduced on appeal on 23 February 2026 to ten months, already served, and two years suspended, with the administrative supervision annulled.

Charges Forming and organising a terrorist group (Organic Law 2015-26 on counterterrorism)
Spreading false information (Decree-Law 54 of 2022)

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Ahmed Souab in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Ahmed Souab faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Ahmed Souab can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Press freedom violation International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

April 2025

Context

Remark about pressure on judges at a lawyers' briefing

At a media briefing by defence lawyers in the 'conspiracy' trial, Souab said that a sword of Damocles hung over the heads of judges. The remark was distorted on social media.

21 April 2025

Arrest

Arrested in Tunisia

Ahmed Souab was arrested under the counterterrorism law and held for 48 hours without access to his lawyer or family, then taken to Mornaguia prison.

28 April 2025

Pretrial detention renewed

Investigating judge refuses his release

The investigating judge rejected the request to release Souab.

31 October 2025

Conviction

First-instance verdict

The Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced Ahmed Souab to five years in prison and three years of administrative supervision, after a hearing of less than ten minutes. He was absent because he refused to appear by video link.

5 January 2026

Medical emergency

Severe nosebleeds and loss of consciousness

On that day, Souab suffered acute nosebleeding in the morning, followed by more severe bleeding in the afternoon that led to loss of consciousness.

February 2026

Pretrial detention renewed

Request for provisional release on health grounds rejected

In early February 2026 a judge rejected a request for his provisional release that his family had made on health grounds. His son said he had suffered a heart attack in 2022.

10 February 2026

Context

Human Rights Watch calls his detention arbitrary

Human Rights Watch called his detention arbitrary and urged his release.

12 February 2026

Hearing

Appeal hearing held without his lawyer or the press

The Tunis Court of Appeal heard his appeal. His lawyer and the press were not allowed to attend.

23 February 2026

Appeal: sentence reduced

Appeal court cuts sentence to ten months served and two years suspended

Tunis Court of Appeal reduces the sentence to ten months, already served, and two years suspended

23 February 2026

Release

Released after the appeal ruling; the suspended sentence still applies

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Ahmed Souab has been free since 23 February 2026, when the Tunis Court of Appeal reduced his sentence to ten months, already served, and two years suspended. The suspended sentence remains in force, and no new arrest, prosecution or travel ban has been reported since his release. He had served on the defence team in the conspiracy case, in which the lawyer Ayachi Hammami, first a defence counsel, is now serving a final five-year sentence.

Background and Work

Ahmed Souab is a Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender who served for decades as a judge at the Administrative Court. As a lawyer he defended people in the mass 'conspiracy against state security' trial and spoke out about the independence of the judiciary. At a media briefing held by defence lawyers in that trial in April 2025, he said that a sword of Damocles hung over the heads of judges, describing the pressure on them. The remark was distorted in a social media campaign.

The Arrest and Charge

Ahmed Souab was arrested on 21 April 2025. He was held for 48 hours without being able to contact his lawyer or his family, and was then taken to Mornaguia prison. He was charged with forming and organising a terrorist group under the 2015 counterterrorism law and with spreading false information under Decree-Law 54 of 2022. Tunisia's counterterrorism framework has been widely criticized for its overbroad application to political speech.

The charge has been used systematically against human-rights defenders, lawyers, bloggers, and opposition figures, particularly since the political reconfigurations that began in 2021.

Legal Proceedings and Sentence

On 31 October 2025, the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced Ahmed Souab to five years' imprisonment after a hearing that lasted less than ten minutes. According to his family, he was convicted of endangering the lives of people entitled to protection and of making threats in connection with a terrorist offence. He was absent because he refused to appear by video link. The judgment also imposed three years of administrative supervision to follow the custodial term. Administrative supervision typically includes reporting obligations, restrictions on movement, and potential surveillance.

The court did not act on his lawyers' request that he appear in person. Tunisia's terrorism courts routinely conduct expedited hearings with limited procedural safeguards, and verdicts are often based on security-service reports rather than independently verified evidence.

Detention Conditions and Current Status

Ahmed Souab was released on 23 February 2026, after the Tunis Court of Appeal cut his sentence to ten months, already served, and two years suspended, and annulled the administrative supervision. His lawyer and the press were not allowed to attend the appeal hearing on 12 February 2026. He had been held at Mornaguia prison, where in January 2026 he suffered severe nosebleeds and

lost consciousness. The two-year suspended sentence remains on his record; no travel ban or other restriction after his release has been reported.

People released in terrorism-related cases in Tunisia often face measures that curtail freedom of movement and expression for years after the formal end of detention. Former detainees report continued surveillance, restrictions on employment, and harassment by security services.

International and Civil-Society Response

Amnesty International condemned his arrest in April 2025, Human Rights Watch called his detention arbitrary in February 2026, and Front Line Defenders called for his release.

Tunisia's use of counterterrorism charges against speech has drawn sustained criticism from UN special rapporteurs, regional mechanisms, and international NGOs, all of whom have called for repeal or amendment of the law. None of those critiques have yet resulted in legislative reform or a shift in prosecutorial practice.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/ahmed-souab/

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement is a non-governmental organisation documenting the situation of human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa. This file is based on the public record of the case in the defenders archive.Status as recorded on 2026-02-23. To report an error: archive@humena.org