

Advocacy dossier

Chaima Issa)

شيماء عيسى

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **Tunisia**

Chaima Issa is a Tunisian poet, writer and senior member of the opposition National Salvation Front. She is held in the women's prison in Manouba, serving a twenty-year sentence in the "conspiracy case" that the Court of Cassation made final on 3 September 2026.

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The case at a glance

Chaima Issa is a Tunisian poet, writer and senior member of the opposition National Salvation Front. She is held in the women's prison in Manouba, serving a twenty-year sentence in the "conspiracy case" that the Court of Cassation made final on 3 September 2026.

Status**Imprisoned (serving sentence)**	Arrested**29 Nov 2025**	Country**Tunisia**
Sentence Twenty years in prison.		
Charges Conspiracy against state security Belonging to a terrorist group		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Chaima Issa immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

04 Provide Chaima Issa with immediate, independent medical evaluation and the full treatment that condition requires, including transfer to an independent civilian hospital if necessary.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

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

Denial of medical care UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rules 24 to 27

Inhumane detention conditions International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10
UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)

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

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

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How the case unfolded

22 February 2023

Arrest

Arrested in the opening wave of the conspiracy case

Security forces arrested her during the wave of arrests of opposition figures that opened the conspiracy case. She was held in pretrial detention in the women's prison in Manouba.

13 July 2023

Conditional release

Provisionally released, then barred from travel and from public spaces

She was provisionally released after nearly five months of pretrial detention. The authorities then banned her from travelling abroad and from appearing in public spaces while the charges remained pending.

13 December 2023

Conviction

Military court gives her a one-year suspended sentence over a radio interview

The Tunis Military Court of First Instance convicted her of inciting the military to disobey orders, an offensive act against the President and spreading false rumours under Decree Law 54, over remarks on the army's role in the December 2022 legislative elections, and gave her a twelve-month suspended sentence.

May 2024

Ruling in absentia

Military appeal court changes the sentence to one year without suspension in her absence

The military court of appeal in Tunis upheld the conviction and changed the sentence to one year in prison without suspension, ruling in her absence. She said she had not been summoned and challenged the ruling.

10 October 2024

Appeal: sentence reduced

Military appeal court reduces the sentence to six months, suspended

After her challenge, the military court of appeal upheld the conviction but reduced the sentence to six months in prison, suspended.

19 April 2025

Conviction

Sentenced to eighteen years at first instance in the Conspiracy Case

A Tunis court sentenced her to eighteen years in prison in the mass proceedings known as the Conspiracy Case, in which dozens of opposition figures and civil society actors were tried together on charges of conspiring against state security and belonging to a terrorist group.

28 November 2025

Appeal: sentence increased

Appeal court raises the sentence from eighteen to twenty years

The Tunis Court of Appeal increased her sentence to twenty years. Thirty-four defendants in the same case received between five and forty-five years.

29 November 2025

Arrest

Arrested at a peaceful protest to enforce the twenty-year sentence

Plainclothes police arrested her on a street in central Tunis while she was taking part in a peaceful demonstration against the crackdown on dissent, one day after the appeal ruling, to enforce the sentence. Her family said her foot was injured during the arrest. She was taken to the women's prison in Manouba.

29 November 2025

Hunger strike begins

Begins a hunger strike in Manouba prison on the day of her arrest

She began a hunger strike on the day of her arrest in protest at the violence of the arrest and at her detention.

December 2025

Hunger strike ends

Suspends her hunger strike after about two and a half weeks

In mid-December 2025 she suspended her hunger strike in response to appeals from supporters, who had gathered outside Manouba prison to call for her release.

3 February 2026

Hunger strike begins

Joins the periodic hunger strike called by Ayachi Hammami

She joined the periodic hunger strike called by her co-defendant Ayachi Hammami, held on the first Tuesday of each month in protest at the detention of political prisoners.

3 September 2026

Appeal: judgment upheld

Court of Cassation upholds the Conspiracy Case convictions; the 20-year sentence is final

The Court of Cassation upheld the convictions and sentences of 34 defendants in the conspiracy case, with final sentences from five to 45 years. Her twenty-year sentence is now final. The hearing had been announced only three days in advance.

November 2026

Hunger strike begins

Announces a periodic hunger strike from Manouba prison in solidarity with Ayachi Hammami

In a letter from the women's prison in Manouba she announced a periodic hunger strike in solidarity with Ayachi Hammami and in protest at her twenty-year sentence, saying she is innocent and that her detention is a political decision. She remains in Manouba prison.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Chaima Issa remains in the women's prison in Manouba, near Tunis, serving the twenty-year sentence in the "conspiracy case" that the Court of Cassation made final on 3 September 2026. In early November 2026 she announced a periodic hunger strike in solidarity with her co-defendant, the lawyer Ayachi Hammami, and in protest at her sentence.

Background and Work

Chaima Issa was born in Tunis in 1980. She studied Islamic sciences at the Higher Institute of Fundamentals of Religion and later obtained a master's degree from Zitouna University; she also studied painting in Tunis and in Rome. She is a poet and writer: her collections include *Biano al-Jumu'a* (Beirut, 2006) and *Maqamat li-Urjuhat al-Mawt* (Tunis, 2013), and in 2020 she published a book on gender, feminism and religion. She worked for a short period as a journalist. Her father, the painter Issa Ibrahim, was arrested in November 1990 on accusations of belonging to the Islamic Tendency Movement.

She stood in the 2014 legislative elections as a candidate of the Democratic Alliance party and was not elected, and in 2020 she served as a chargée de mission to the Minister for Women and the Family. After President Kais Saied suspended parliament and dismissed the government on 25 July 2021, she publicly opposed these measures. She co-founded the Citizens Against the Coup initiative, acted as one of its spokespersons, and became a senior member of the National Salvation Front, the opposition coalition in which she was responsible for foreign relations.

The Arrest

Security forces arrested her on 22 February 2023, during the wave of arrests of opposition figures that opened the so-called "conspiracy case", and she was held in the women's prison in Manouba. The charges rested on her political activity, including meetings with foreign diplomats. On 13 July 2023 she was provisionally released after nearly five months in pretrial detention, together with the lawyer and politician Lazhar Akremi. The authorities then barred her from travelling abroad and from "appearing in public spaces".

On 28 November 2025 the Tunis Court of Appeal raised her sentence in the conspiracy case to twenty years. The following day, 29 November 2025, plainclothes police officers arrested her on a street in central Tunis while she was taking part in a peaceful demonstration against the crackdown on dissent. One of her lawyers, Samir Dilou, said officers seized her during the march and pushed her into a vehicle. Her family said her foot was injured during the arrest. She was taken to the women's prison in Manouba.

Detention Conditions and Health

She began a hunger strike on the day of her arrest in protest at the violence of the arrest and at her detention. She suspended it in mid-December 2025, after about two and a half weeks, in response to appeals from supporters who had gathered outside Manouba prison. On 3 February 2026 she joined the periodic hunger strike called by her co-defendant Ayachi Hammami, held on the first Tuesday of each

month in protest at the detention of political prisoners. In early November 2026 she again announced a periodic hunger strike, in solidarity with Ayachi Hammami, who had been moved to Monastir prison, and in protest at her sentence. In a letter from prison published in November 2026 she said she was separated from her son and her elderly father.

Amnesty International reported in September 2026 that heatwaves of over 45°C had worsened conditions in poorly ventilated cells and affected the health of the detained defendants in the case.

Legal Proceedings

In a separate case, the permanent military court in Tunis convicted her on 13 December 2023 over remarks she made in a December 2022 radio interview about the army's role in the legislative elections. She was found guilty of inciting the military to disobey orders under the Code of Military Justice, of an offensive act against the President under the Penal Code, and of spreading "false rumours" under Decree Law 54, and received a one-year suspended sentence. In May 2024 the military court of appeal, ruling in her absence, changed the sentence to one year without suspension; she challenged that ruling, and on 10 October 2024 the military court of appeal reduced the sentence to six months, suspended.

In the conspiracy case, 37 opposition figures, lawyers and activists were prosecuted on charges of conspiracy against state security and terrorism offences. On 19 April 2025 the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced her to eighteen years in prison, after a trial in which the defendants were not allowed to attend or speak and evidence was not publicly presented. The appeal trial ended in late November 2025, when the Tunis Court of Appeal upheld the convictions of 34 defendants with sentences from five to 45 years and raised her sentence to twenty years. Her co-defendants include Ayachi Hammami, Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, Jaouhar Ben Mbarek, Issam Chebbi, Ghazi Chaouachi, Ridha Belhaj, Khayam Turki and Abdelhamid Jelassi. On 3 September 2026 the Court of Cassation upheld the convictions and sentences, exhausting the ordinary domestic remedies; the hearing had been announced only three days in advance.

International Response

Amnesty International has followed her case through a series of urgent actions since 2023. In December 2023 it called for her military court conviction to be quashed. Its urgent action of 8 December 2025 described her arrest as violent and arbitrary, and its urgent action of 7 September 2026 called on President Kais Saied to quash the convictions and sentences in the conspiracy case and to release all those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights. Human Rights Watch described the first trial as unjust and, on 3 September 2026, said the Court of Cassation ruling had been the last resort for the 34 people convicted, who are now in prison or in exile.

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