

Advocacy dossier

# Sonia Dahmani

سنية الدهماني

**At liberty** **Tunisia**

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer and commentator for IFM radio and Carthage Plus television who spent 18 months in prison under Decree-Law 54 before her release in November 2025. She remains free but faces at least five prosecutions and further prison terms, including a two-year sentence imposed in May 2026 that is under appeal.

# 01
# The case at a glance

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer and commentator for IFM radio and Carthage Plus television who spent 18 months in prison under Decree-Law 54 before her release in November 2025. She remains free but faces at least five prosecutions and further prison terms, including a two-year sentence imposed in May 2026 that is under appeal.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Status **At liberty** | Arrested **11 May 2024** | Country **Tunisia** |
| Sentence Several prison sentences under Decree-Law 54; the most recent, two years imposed on 22 May 2026, is under appeal with execution suspended | | |
| Charges Spreading false news (Decree-Law 54)<br>Spreading false news likely to harm a public official (Decree-Law 54) | | |

## What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

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

**02** Confirm publicly that Sonia Dahmani faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

**03** Guarantee that Sonia Dahmani can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

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

02

# How the case unfolded

**11 May 2024**

Arrest

### Arrested at the Tunis Bar Association

Masked police arrested Sonia Dahmani at the headquarters of the Tunis Bar Association after she missed a summons for questioning over remarks made on Carthage Plus on 8 May.

**13 May 2024**

Pretrial detention ordered

### Investigative judge orders her detention

An investigative judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered her detention pending investigation under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 over her remarks on a television programme. She was held in Manouba prison. The Tunisian Bar Association called a strike the same day in protest at her arrest.

**31 May 2024**

Other act

### UN experts condemn the arrest at the bar association

Four UN special rapporteurs, among them Margaret Satterthwaite, Irene Khan and Mary Lawlor, condemned the violent arrest of Sonia Dahmani and of lawyer Mehdi Zagrouba at the headquarters of the Tunisian Bar Association as violations of fundamental rights.

**6 July 2024**

Conviction

### Sentenced to one year for spreading false news

The Tunis Court of First Instance convicted her of spreading false news under Decree-Law 54 and sentenced her to one year in prison.

**20 August 2024**

Ill-treatment

### Forced to undress in a prison search

Before a court hearing, prison staff searched her in a manner that her family and lawyers said involved forced undressing.

**10 September 2024**

Appeal: sentence reduced

### Appeal court reduces sentence to eight months

An appeals court upheld the conviction and reduced the sentence to eight months, ruling without a hearing and without her lawyers present.

**October 2024**

Conviction

### Sentenced to two years over remarks on racism

She was sentenced to two years in prison under Decree-Law 54 over comments on IFM radio about racism against sub-Saharan Africans.

**16 December 2024**

Detention conditions and health

### Amnesty reports cruel conditions in Manouba prison

Amnesty International reported that she was held in Manouba prison in cruel and inhuman conditions, including freezing cold from a broken window, denial of clean clothing and medication, and humiliating treatment by guards, and that she had developed serious health problems.

**24 January 2025**

Appeal: sentence reduced

### Appeal court reduces IFM case sentence to 18 months

The criminal chamber of the Tunis Court of Appeal upheld her conviction over the IFM radio remarks on racism and reduced the two-year sentence to 18 months.

**30 June 2025**

**Conviction**

### Sentenced to a further two years

She was sentenced to two more years over the same comments, this time as broadcast on Carthage Plus.

**July 2025**

**Reprisal against relatives**

### Sister sentenced in absentia for advocating for her

Her sister Ramla Dahmani was sentenced in absentia to two years in prison under Decree-Law 54 for advocating for her and criticising her treatment in prison.

**14 July 2025**

**Other act**

### UN experts cite her case in alarm over lawyers in Tunisia

UN experts said the charges against her appeared to stem solely from her public speech, in a statement on the deteriorating situation of lawyers in Tunisia that also named Ahmed Souab, Ayachi Hammami, Dalila Msaddek, Islem Hamza, Ghazi Chaouachi, Mehdi Zagrouba and Lazhar Akremi.

**27 November 2025**

**Release**

### Released from Manouba prison

She was released from prison in Manouba, near Tunis, after about 18 months in detention, under a release order issued by the Minister of Justice for prisoners who have served half their sentence, on the day the European Parliament adopted an urgency resolution calling for her release. Her other cases were not dropped.

**13 April 2026**

**Appeal: sentence reduced**

### Appeal court upholds conviction with 18-month sentence

A Tunis appeals court upheld her conviction under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 over 2024 remarks on Carthage Plus about racism and migration, reducing the two-year sentence imposed on 30 June 2025 to 18 months. She remained free but at risk of arrest.

**22 May 2026**

**Conviction**

### Sentenced to two years over comments on prison conditions

The Tunis Court of First Instance convicted her of spreading false news likely to harm a public official over 2023 radio comments on prison conditions, after a complaint by the prisons administration, and sentenced her to two years. Her lawyers appealed, which suspends execution of the sentence. As of September 2026 she remained outside prison but at risk of being returned to it.

# 03
# The full story

**Update, 12 November 2026:** Sonia Dahmani has been out of prison since 27 November 2025, but she remains under several prison sentences imposed under Decree-Law 54. Her appeal against a two-year sentence handed down in May 2026 was pending at the time of the most recent reports, and she can be returned to prison if the sentences are enforced.

## Background and Work

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer, a member of the Tunisian Bar Association, and a writer and media commentator. Before her arrest she appeared regularly on radio and television, including on the morning programme "Emission Impossible" on the independent station IFM and on "Denya Zina" on the Carthage Plus channel. Her commentary covered the independence of the judiciary, civil liberties, prison conditions, and the treatment of migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa.

Her public remarks led to a series of complaints before her arrest. In November 2023 an investigative judge summoned her after a complaint by the General Directorate of Prisons over comments she made on the radio about conditions of detention. In January 2024 she was summoned again after a complaint by the Minister of Justice over her statement that putting people in prison was not an achievement.

## The Arrest

On 8 May 2024, on a Carthage Plus programme, she answered a question about whether migrants wished to settle in Tunisia by asking what kind of extraordinary country was meant, when half of its young people wanted to leave. She was summoned by an investigative judge and did not appear. On the evening of 11 May 2024 masked members of the security forces in civilian clothing entered the headquarters of the Tunisian Bar Association in Tunis and arrested her. A France 24 journalist filming the scene was briefly detained.

The same day police also arrested two IFM journalists from the programme on which she appeared, the presenter Borhen Bsaies and the commentator Mourad Zghidi. On 13 May 2024 an investigative judge ordered her detention under Article 24 of Decree-Law 54, which punishes the spreading of false news with up to five years in prison, and the Bar Association began a strike in protest.

## Detention Conditions and Health

She was held in Manouba women's prison near Tunis. Her family and lawyers said that before a hearing on 20 August 2024 prison staff searched her in a way that involved forced undressing. In December 2024 Amnesty International reported that she faced freezing cold because of a broken window, was denied clean clothing and medication, was subjected to humiliating treatment by guards, and had developed serious health problems. Her sister, Ramla Dahmani, told the Committee to Protect Journalists that she was denied treatment for conditions that developed in detention, including diabetes, thyroid problems and high blood pressure.

## Legal Proceedings

The authorities have brought five separate cases against her, all over media statements. On 6 July

2024 the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced her to one year in prison for spreading false news over the May 2024 remarks; on 10 September 2024 an appeal court reduced this to eight months, ruling without a hearing and without her lawyers present. In October 2024 she was sentenced to two years over comments on IFM about racism against sub-Saharan Africans, reduced to 18 months on appeal on 24 January 2025. On 30 June 2025 she received a further two-year sentence over the same comments as broadcast on Carthage Plus.

She was released from Manouba prison on 27 November 2025 under a release order issued by the Minister of Justice for prisoners who have served half their sentence. Her lawyer, Sami Ben Ghazi, said her remaining cases were not dropped. On 13 April 2026 the Tunis Court of Appeal upheld the June 2025 conviction and reduced the sentence to 18 months; the defence argued that she had been tried twice for the same words. On 22 May 2026 the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced her to two years for spreading false news likely to harm a public official, over comments made in 2023 about prison conditions, following the complaint lodged on behalf of the General Directorate of Prisons. Her lawyers appealed, which suspends execution of the sentence.

In July 2025 her sister, Ramla Dahmani, was sentenced in absentia to two years in prison under Decree-Law 54 for speaking publicly about her case.

## International Response

On 31 May 2024 four UN special rapporteurs, among them Margaret Satterthwaite, Irene Khan and Mary Lawlor, condemned the violent arrests of Sonia Dahmani and of the lawyer Mehdi Zagrouba at the Bar Association. On 14 July 2025 UN experts said that the charges against her appeared to stem solely from her public speech, in a statement on the situation of lawyers in Tunisia that also named Ahmed Souab and Ayachi Hammami. Amnesty International issued urgent actions in May and December 2024 calling for her release, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights and the Committee to Protect Journalists documented her case.

The Committee to Protect Journalists gave her its International Press Freedom Award in 2025, in her absence. The European Parliament adopted an urgency resolution calling for her release on the day she left prison. In September 2026 the Committee to Protect Journalists described her situation as one of deferred imprisonment, alongside the cases of the imprisoned journalists Borhen Bsaies, Mourad Zghidi and Zied El Heni.

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