Tunisia: HuMENA Calls for Immediate Release of Sonia Dahmani Amid Alarming Violations

Press Releases · Tunisia · 17 June 2025

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement expresses its deep concern over the continued detention of lawyer and media figure Sonia Dahmani, who has been imprisoned for nearly a year following a shocking raid on the Bar Association and her public arrest. This violation marks a dangerous precedent that undermines the independence of the legal profession and erodes the principle of the rule of law in Tunisia.

Despite repeated condemnations by both local and international civil society organizations, Tunisian authorities continue their repressive practices against political opponents and human rights defenders, as part of a systematic policy aimed at silencing all critical voices.

On 11 June 2025, Sonia Dahmani was transferred to court without prior notice or adherence to legal safeguards, and her trial was once again postponed to 16 June. This constitutes a clear violation of her right to appear before a competent, independent, and impartial tribunal within a reasonable time.

Following her appearance before the judiciary on June 16, the court issued yet another postponement of her hearing now deferred to June 30 in what it claims to be the final and conclusive session, prolonging a process already marked by undue delays and legal uncertainty.

Dahmani faces charges based on media statements, including “offending others through communication networks” under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code, in addition to accusations of “spreading false news” and “undermining the prestige of the judiciary.” These vague provisions are being used to criminalize legitimate expression and are deployed as tools for political retaliation, in blatant violation of the Tunisian Constitution and the country’s international obligations.

Credible reports have indicated a serious deterioration in her health condition inside prison due to high blood pressure episodes requiring frequent medical attention, amid the absence of adequate healthcare. This constitutes a violation of her right to physical integrity and medical care, as protected under international human rights law.

Additional testimonies suggest that she has been subjected to deliberate ill-treatment by a fellow inmate appointed as the cell’s head, including isolation from other prisoners, theft of personal belongings, and the spreading of defamatory rumors. Such degrading treatment violates the principles of human dignity and contravenes the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules).

These abuses amount to a grave breach of international standards ratified by Tunisia. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights affirms the right to a fair trial and humane treatment of detainees. The Convention Against Torture obligates the state to prevent all forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The Nelson Mandela Rules (PDF) guarantee humane detention conditions, appropriate healthcare, and protection from abuse. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (PDF) also affirms comprehensive protection of human rights and rejects all forms of repression.

HuMENA calls on the Tunisian authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release lawyer Sonia Dahmani.
- Provide her with urgent and comprehensive medical care in prison or at an independent medical facility.
- Launch an impartial and transparent investigation into all allegations of ill-treatment and medical neglect, and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Respect her right to a fair trial, including all procedural guarantees.
- End all targeting of lawyers and human rights defenders, and ensure they are protected from any acts of reprisal.

HuMENA emphasizes that the continuation of such repressive policies not only violates fundamental rights, but also represents a serious retreat from Tunisia's international commitments, placing the authorities in direct breach of their legal obligations before the international community.

Published at https://humena.org/sonia-dahmani-detention-tunisia-2025/
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