Tunisia | HuMENA calls for the release of four Global Sumud Flotilla activists amid alarming health and detention conditions

Statements · Tunisia · 11 August 2026

HuMENA expresses its deep concern over the continued pretrial detention of four Tunisian activists associated with the Global Sumud Flotilla: Wael Naouar, Ghassen Henchiri, Ghassen Boughdiri and Nabil Channoufi. They have been held since their arrests on different dates in March 2026, pending an ongoing investigation before the Economic and Financial Judicial Pole.

Following the investigating judge's decision to place seven activists in pretrial detention, HuMENA issued an earlier statement in which it condemned the decision as a dangerous escalation in the criminalization of humanitarian solidarity as well as the use by Tunisian authorities of pretrial detention measures against civil society actors for their engagement in public life which consequently restricts the space of public engagement in peaceful solidarity work.

The continued detention of the remaining four activists, coupled with mounting reports of deteriorating health and inadequate prison conditions, raises serious human rights concerns.

Nearly five months into this case, serious questions remain as to whether continued deprivation of liberty has been justified through individualized assessments of necessity and proportionality. HuMENA's documentation of the health situation and detention conditions of one of the imprisoned four activists, as well as information circulating online about a second detainee, indicate an alarming health situation and detention conditions that fall significantly short of Tunisia's own domestic obligations and international human rights standards.

The four activists remain in pretrial detention in connection with an investigation before the Tunis Economic and Financial Judicial Pole. Based on the information currently available from Tunisian media reports, lawyers and support committees, the investigation concerns suspected money laundering and financial transactions linked to donations collected for the flotilla, alongside allegations of fraud and other financial offences.

In April 2026, authorities released two of the seven activists, Jawaher Channa and Sana Msahli after roughly six and seven weeks in jail respectively. Tunisian media reported that the release of Jawaher Channa is subject to restrictive judicial measures, including a travel ban, restrictions on movement and residence, and a ban on public appearances. At the same hearing, the investigating judge maintained the detention order against activist Ghassen Henchiri, extending his pretrial detention.

On 22 May, the investigating judge ordered the release of Mohamed Amine Bennour following a

request by his defence team. Tunisian media reported that his release was accompanied by judicial control measures including a travel ban and restrictions on media and social media appearances.

A publication by Ghassen Boughdiri's support committee states that authorities have scheduled a first hearing on 16 July 2026 before an investigating judge at the Economic and Financial Pole, in connection with the Sumud Flotilla financial investigation. HuMENA has not been able to independently confirm the outcome of that hearing.

The support committee reports that Boughdiri faces a second investigation for his participation in a protest against Maersk over the company's alleged role in facilitating the transfer of weapons to Israel. The committee states that Boughdiri had already appeared for investigation without a lawyer during a previous hearing and that a new one is scheduled for 11 August 2026.

Deteriorating health conditions

HuMENA is particularly concerned by the health condition of Ghassen Boughdiri and Ghassen Henchiri. According to his support committee, Boughdiri's health is reportedly deteriorating and he suffers from kidney pain, a skin rash and a head injury. According to information obtained from a close family member of Ghassen Henchiri following a prison visit on 6 August 2026, he suffers from severe and persistent head pain which, according to his relative, he associates with an injury he says he sustained during the interception of an earlier Gaza-bound flotilla in 2025. According to the relative, prison medical staff examined Henchiri in early July and conducted medical tests but the results remain unavailable to Henchiri and his family. According to the relative, Henchiri has repeatedly sought a medical consultation outside the prison but has not yet received one.

Henchiri's family further indicated that his longstanding back condition has worsened in detention. Despite his medical needs, his relative told HuMENA that Henchiri currently shares a single bed with three other detainees in an overcrowded cell. During the same visit on 6 August, he described repeated interruptions to electricity and running water, prolonged shortages of potable water, extreme temperatures inside the prison and generally degrading detention conditions. According to his relative, these conditions have taken a growing physical and psychological toll on him.

HuMENA has not received direct information regarding the current health or specific detention conditions of Wael Naouar and Nabil Channoufi. The four activists remain imprisoned in El Mornaguia prison.

Prolonged detention raises serious legal concerns

The four activists have remained in pretrial detention since March 2026 while the judicial investigation continues. Under Articles 84 and 85 of Tunisia's Code of Criminal Procedure, pretrial detention is exceptional and requires specific grounds, with any order or extension setting out the factual and legal reasons. Article 85 sets an initial six-month period, subject to legally defined extensions. As they approach this limit in September 2026, any continued detention must meet these legal requirements.

The continued detention of the four illustrates the risk that pretrial detention is being used in a

manner that unnecessarily restricts individual liberty without sufficiently individualized justification, undermining due process guarantees and raising broader concerns about the protection of civic freedoms in Tunisia.

Amnesty International has documented the use by Tunisian authorities in the past years of vague legal provisions to jail high-profile opponents, public figures and perceived enemies of President Kais Saied. Amnesty describes this as a deepening regression in human rights and judicial independence.

Tunisia is a State Party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides, in its article 9, that detention pending trial should not be the general rule. In its General Comment No. 35, the United Nations Human Rights Committee has emphasized that continued pretrial detention must be based on an individualized assessment demonstrating that detention remains reasonable, necessary and proportionate. Legitimate grounds may include a concrete risk of absconding, interference with evidence or witnesses, or the commission of further serious offences. The Committee has made clear that the mere existence of an ongoing investigation or the seriousness of the allegations cannot, on their own, justify prolonged detention.

The Tunisian Constitution protects individual liberty under Article 26 and provides safeguards against arbitrary arrest and detention under Article 35. Article 55 requires any restrictions on rights and freedoms to be based on law and comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality. The Code of Criminal Procedure also treats pretrial detention as an exceptional measure subject to judicial oversight and review. As detention is prolonged, the authorities must provide stronger justification that it remains necessary and lawful.

The Nelson Mandela Rules require that persons deprived of liberty receive health care equivalent to that available in the community, have prompt access to specialized medical treatment where necessary, and be held in conditions that respect their dignity, including adequate accommodation, bedding, potable water and sanitation. The information documented by HuMENA concerning Ghassen Henchiri, together with publicly reported information regarding Ghassen Boughdiri, indicates delayed medical care, overcrowding, inadequate sleeping arrangements, interruptions in water and electricity, and prolonged exposure to extreme heat. These reported conditions raise serious concerns regarding Tunisia’s compliance with its obligations toward persons deprived of their liberty.

The detention and prosecution of the Global Sumud Flotilla activists also raise concerns about Tunisia’s shrinking civic space. As HuMENA has documented in its work on the suspension of Avocats Sans Frontières and the criminalization of civil society actors, legal and administrative measures against activists and civil society organizations can have a wider chilling effect on legitimate civic engagement. Regardless of the outcome of the proceedings, the authorities must ensure that criminal investigations do not unduly restrict the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, and must safeguard the activists’ health, dignity and fundamental rights while they remain detained.

HuMENA calls on the Tunisian authorities to:

- Immediately release Wael Naouar, Ghassen Henchiri, Ghassen Boughdiri and Nabil Channoufi pending trial unless the authorities can demonstrate, on the basis of individualized and lawful grounds, that their continued detention remains strictly necessary and proportionate.
- Ensure that criminal proceedings are not used to punish or deter peaceful civic activity, and that any financial investigation is based on identifiable evidence and conducted with full respect for due process.
- Ensure that the ongoing investigation against them and any future judicial proceedings fully respect the right to a fair trial, including regular judicial review of the necessity of continued pretrial detention.
- Pending release, ensure that all four detainees receive prompt, independent and appropriate medical examinations and treatment, including referral to specialist medical care outside prison where medically required.
- Guarantee that detention conditions are consistent with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, including adequate accommodation and bedding, sufficient drinking water, sanitation, ventilation, appropriate lighting and conditions compatible with health and human dignity.
- Ensure that the detainees are able to communicate regularly with their families and lawyers and that any restrictions on these contacts are lawful, necessary and proportionate.
- HuMENA further calls on the United Nations special procedures, in particular the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, as well as the European Union and Tunisia's other international partners, to seek clarification from the Tunisian authorities on the legal basis for the continued detention of the four activists and on their access to adequate medical care.

HuMENA also urges the United Nations special procedures and Tunisia's international partners to raise these cases with the Tunisian authorities and to press for the activists' release and access to adequate medical care.

Published at https://humena.org/tunisia-global-sumud-flotilla-activists-detention/
HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · info@humena.org