HuMENA Joins the Committee to Protect Journalists and 15 Rights and Media Organizations in Calling for Zied el-Heni's Release

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The undersigned press freedom and human rights organizations condemn the escalating judicial harassment of veteran Tunisian journalist Zied el-Heni, who is now facing three separate prosecutions linked to his journalistic work and critical commentary, including a terrorism-related case that could expose him to a life sentence.

On October 27, el-Heni was convicted of four terrorism charges and sentenced to four years in prison, in connection with his journalistic work on a leaked 2023 audio recording attributed to former Ennahda official Mondher Lounissi. El-Heni discussed the recording on his radio program Émission Impossible as part of efforts to verify its authenticity. His defense has maintained that he was initially questioned as a witness before becoming a suspect after refusing to disclose information that could compromise his journalistic sources.

Following his release, El-Heni faces five years of police supervision, which restricts his travels outside a designated area, and mandates regular police check-ins, his daughter Ithar El-Heni told CPJ.

El-Heni is already serving a one-year prison sentence under Article 86 of the Telecommunications Code following his April 24, 2026 arrest over a social media post. His sentence was upheld on appeal on June 26.

In a separate third case, authorities issued detention orders against El-Heni in June in connection with his reporting and commentary concerning the Carthage municipal council.

Taken together, the three cases against El-Heni demonstrate an alarming pattern of judicial harassment in which authorities repeatedly open new proceedings against a journalist already behind bars, using telecommunications, criminal, and counterterrorism legislation to punish legitimate journalistic activity.

The prosecution of El-Heni comes amid a broader deterioration in press freedom in Tunisia, where journalists have increasingly faced imprisonment, prosecution, and lengthy sentences for their reporting and commentary. The use of terrorism-related charges against journalistic activity is particularly alarming and risks further chilling independent reporting in the country.

We, the undersigned organizations, call on the Tunisian authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Zied el-Heni and overturn all convictions against

him stemming from his journalistic work and peaceful expression
2. Drop all pending charges against El-Heni in his third case
3. End the use of criminal and counterterrorism laws to silence the press

Signatories:

1. Amnesty International
2. ARTICLE 19
3. Cartoonists Rights
4. Cedar Centre for Legal Studies (CCLS)
5. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
6. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
7. Free UN Coalition for Access
8. HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
9. Inkyfada
10. International Association of People's Lawyers (IAPL)
11. lakome2.com
12. Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT) gGmbH
13. MENA Rights Group
14. People in Need
15. Samir Kassir Foundation
16. SMEX
17. The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP)

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