

URGENT ACTION

LAWYER ARRESTED OVER PUBLIC REMARKS

On May 11, 2024, security forces, masked and in civilian clothing stormed the Bar Association offices in Tunis to arrest lawyer and media personality, Sonia Dahmani. On May 13, an investigative judge in the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered her detention pending investigation over critical remarks she made on a TV show. She is accused of spreading false information under Article 24 of draconian cybercrimes Decree-Law 54 which carries a five-year prison sentence and a fine of 50,000 dinars (around 16,000 USD). Sonia Dahmani is currently arbitrarily detained in the Manouba prison in Tunis and her next hearing with judicial authorities is scheduled for May 20. We call on the Tunisian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Sonia Dahmani as she is detained solely for peacefully exercising her right to freedom of expression and drop the baseless criminal investigation against her.

TAKE ACTION:

- Write a letter in your own words or using the sample below as a guide to one or both government officials listed. You can also email, fax, call or Tweet them.
- [Click here](#) to let us know the actions you took on **Urgent Action 43.24**. It's important to report because we share the total number with the officials we are trying to persuade and the people we are trying to help.

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Route de la Goulette
Site archéologique de Carthage, Tunisie
Email: contact@carthage.tn
Twitter: [@TnPresidency](https://twitter.com/TnPresidency)

Tunisian Ambassador to the United States Her Excellency Mrs. Hanene Tajouri Bessassi

1515 Massachusetts Avenue,
NW, Washington DC 20005
Email: AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org

Your Excellency,

I am gravely concerned over the arbitrary arrest and detention of Tunisian lawyer, **Sonia Dahmani**. Her arrest contravenes International Human Rights Law, including Articles 6 and 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Articles 9 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Tunisia is a state party.

I urge you to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of Sonia Dahmani and that the baseless criminal investigation against her is dropped. Moreover, I call on you and your government to cease the targeted arrests of critics for the peaceful exercise of their human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer and prominent media personality who frequently appears on radio and TV shows such as “Emission Impossible” on IFM Radio and “Denya Zida” on Carthage+. Sonia Dahmani is also facing investigation in two other separate cases for public comments critical of the authorities. In November 2023, she was [summoned](#) by an investigative judge following a complaint on the basis of Article 24 of Decree-Law 54 raised by the General Directorate of Prisons after she made critical remarks about detention conditions in prisons during a radio show. In a separate case, she was [summoned](#) by an investigative judge in January 2024 following a [complaint](#) raised by Minister of Justice Laila Jaffel.

Following Sonia Dahmani’s arrest on May 11, two journalists who appeared on the same radio show with her were also arrested. They are also facing [investigation](#) over public critical remarks against the authorities and an investigative judge ordered their pretrial [detention](#).

Following Sonia Dahmani’s arrest, the National Order of Lawyers (ONAT) announced a [strike](#) on May 13 to protest against the arbitrary arrest of their colleague. The [French authorities](#) and the [European Union](#) have already expressed their concerns regarding the latest wave of arrests targeting members of civil society organizations and journalists, including Sonia Dahmani.

Since the promulgation of [Decree-Law 54](#) on September 13, 2022, authorities have ramped up their targeting of individuals exercising their right to freedom of expression, making frequent use of the new draconian cybercrimes law. At least 22 individuals, including lawyers, journalists, bloggers, and political activists, were summoned for questioning, prosecuted or sentenced in relation to public comments perceived as critical of the authorities, including at least 13 on the basis of the cybercrime law and in most cases following governmental complaints.

Decree-Law 54 contravenes human rights treaties including the provisions of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Tunisia is a state party. Both Article 9 of the Charter and Article 19 of the Covenant guarantee the right to freedom of expression. Restrictions on the right based on ambiguous, overly broad terms such as “fake news” and other repressive provisions of the cybercrime law fail to meet the requirements of legality, necessity, and proportionality.

Since his power grab on July 25, 2021, President Saied has claimed emergency powers, claiming these were granted to him by Tunisia’s 2014 Constitution. Since February 2023, the human rights situation in Tunisia has been rapidly [deteriorating](#) as several opposition figures, dissidents, perceived enemies of the president and critics of the government have been targeted and harassed. The crackdown on opposition and critics is a flagrant attack on the rule of law and human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in Tunisia, rights protected under Articles 19, 21, and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Articles 9, 10, and 11 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, English, French, or your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: July 11, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Sonia Dahmani (she/her).