

URGENT ACTION

EX-MINISTER TO BE TRIED ON BOGUS CHARGES

On April 16, 2024, the Criminal Chamber of the Tunis Court of Cassation confirmed the indictment of ex-justice minister and senior Ennahdha leader Nouredine Bhiri who will now face trial on charges of “trying to change the form of the government.” He will be tried under Article 72 of the penal code, which is punishable by the death penalty. Nouredine Bhiri is accused based on a social media post he has denied writing, which was also confirmed by expert appointed by the accusation chamber. Since his arrest on February 13, 2023, Nouredine Bhiri has been held in pre-trial detention in the Mornaguia prison. The Tunisian authorities must immediately release Nouredine Bhiri and drop all politically motivated charges against him.

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 *Third Urgent Action 2.22*. 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
Salutation: Dear Ambassador Mrs. Hanene Tajouri
Bessassi

Your Excellency, or Dear Ambassador,

I am gravely concerned about the prolonged arbitrary detention of ex-justice minister and senior Ennahdha official, **Nouredine Bhiri**, now held on politically motivated charges over a social media post he did not write.

I urge you to immediately release Nouredine Bhiri and drop all bogus charges against him. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he receives any medical treatment he may require and continue to allow him regular visits from his family and lawyers. Moreover, I call on you to cease your targeted arrests of critics for the peaceful exercise of their human rights including the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Noureddine Bhiri (64) is a leading member of Ennahda and former Minister of Justice from 2011 to 2013 who served under a coalition government created following the ouster of long-time ruler, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali on January 14, 2011. Noureddine Bhiri is a lawyer and member of the Tunisian Bar Association. He had also previously served as vice-president of Ennahdha, the main political party in Tunisia with a majority in parliament before President Kais Saied suspended it on July 25, 2021, citing emergency powers under Article 80 of the Constitution. The party has criticized President Saied's concentration of powers since the July 2021 suspension of parliament, calling it a coup.

The arrest of Noureddine Bhiri on February 13, 2023 and his subsequent detention stem from critical online remarks that the authorities claim he had posted on January 8, 2023 on his private Facebook page, around the time of a demonstration organized by members of the National Salvation Front, an opposition coalition. A copy of the Facebook post was shared with Amnesty International by a member of his defense team. In the post, he calls for “peaceful resistance against the coup”. He says that “people shouldn’t be afraid of the coup and that they need leadership”. Additionally, Noureddine Bhiri denied being the author of the social media post. In any case, the speech in the Facebook post, which is no longer available online, is fully protected by international human rights law.

Noureddine Bhiri is currently held in Mornaguia prison under the accusation of “trying to change the form of government” and “inciting violence” under Article 72 of the Penal Code. If convicted, he could face the death penalty. He has long suffered from diabetes and high blood pressure, and normally takes regular medication for both ailments. His health is at risk. Under international human rights law, and specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights to which Tunisia is a state party, everyone has the rights to freedom of expression and freedom from arbitrary detention.

Noureddine Bhiri had already experienced arbitrary arrest and house arrest when men in civilian clothing arrested [him and another man, Fathi Beldi](#), a former Interior Ministry official, on December 31, 2021 and held them both at undisclosed locations for two days. Authorities subsequently placed both men under house arrest. On March 7, 2022, the Ministry of Interior lifted the house arrest and Tunisian authorities eventually filed no formal charges against both men. On July 25, 2021, President Saied claimed emergency powers that he said were granted to him by Tunisia's 2014 Constitution. Since then, authorities have opened criminal investigations against at least 74 opposition figures and other perceived enemies of the president, including at least 44 people accused of crimes in connection with the peaceful exercise of their human rights.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: July 3, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Noureddine Bhiri (he/him).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/7257/2023/en/>.