

# URGENT ACTION

## FORMER HEAD OF TRUTH COMMISSION ARBITRARILY DETAINED

On August 1, 2024, a Tunis investigative judge ordered the pre-trial detention of prominent human rights defender, Sihem Bensedrine, who was president of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) until 2018. Sihem Bensedrine has been under investigation since February 2023 under charges of “fraud”, “forgery”, and “abuse of official capacity” following a complaint about the alleged falsification of the chapter about corruption in the banking sector in the IVD final report. Sihem Bensedrine pre-trial detention is arbitrary because it is based solely on the peaceful exercise of her human rights. The detention also falls short of international standards of fairness. Her prosecution appears to be a reprisal for her work exposing human rights violations as head of the IVD. Sihem Bensedrine is currently detained pending trial in the Manouba prison for woman. Authorities must immediately release Sihem Bensedrine, drop all the charges against her, and end the misuse of the criminal justice system to target 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 76.24**. 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](mailto:contact@carthage.tn)  
Twitter: [@TnPresidency](https://twitter.com/TnPresidency)

#### Tunisian Ambassador to the United States

**Mrs. Hanene Tajouri Bessassi**  
1515 Massachusetts Avenue,  
NW, Washington DC 20005  
Email: [AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org](mailto:AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org)  
Salutation: Dear Ambassador Mrs. Hanene Tajouri  
Bessassi

Your Excellency, or Dear Ambassador,

I urge you to immediately release **Sihem Bensedrine** and drop the criminal charges against her as they are based on her work as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) which documented and referred to prosecution the crimes committed under previous regimes. Sihem Bensedrine is a human rights defender and a journalist who has long denounced human rights violations in Tunisia.

Sihem Bensedrine must not be punished for exposing allegations of human rights abuses and corruption committed by past regimes. Tunisian authorities must uphold and ensure her human rights and protect her and the IVD members from reprisal including in the form of civil or criminal prosecution brought against them because of their work or the content of their reports.

I urge you to immediately release Sihem Bensedrine, drop all the charges against her, and end the misuse of the criminal justice system to target her. Pending her release, she must be granted regular access to her family, lawyers and adequate medical care, and held in conditions that comply with international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

Yours sincerely,

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

**Sihem Bensedrine**, 74, is a prominent human rights defender recognized for her independent journalism and [human rights work](#) under Ben Ali's regime. Since President Kaies Saied's power grab in July 2021, she has been a vocal critic of actions undermining Tunisia's rule of law and judicial independence. From 2014 to 2018, she led the IVD, an organization established to document and seek accountability for human rights violations and corruption by state officials from 1955 to 2013, with the authority to refer [serious cases](#) to specialized transitional justice criminal chambers.

The IVD, established in March 2014 with a four-year mandate (extendable by one year), extended its mandate until the end of 2018 [despite opposition](#). On December 28, 2018, the Presidency informed the IVD that its report was due on December 31. To meet the deadline, the IVD board, chaired by Sihem Bensedrine, adopted a preliminary report on December 30, 2018, pending revisions. The [final report](#) was published on the IVD website on March 26, 2019 and in the Official Gazette (JORT) on June 24, 2020. Throughout its mandate, the IVD faced [efforts](#) to undermine its work, with government agencies like the ministries of interior and defense failing to fully cooperate.

In May 2020, a former IVD Commissioner filed a complaint against Sihem Bensedrine with the National Higher Instance Against Corruption, accusing her of "forging the final report" by adding a section on corruption in the Tunisian banking system, specifically regarding a dispute between the government and the French Tunisian Bank. The complaint alleges she did this for personal gain, as the added section could lead to costly reparations for the government. In March 2021, the National Higher Instance Against Corruption referred the complaint to the Tunis General Prosecution.

In 2021, the judicial police's economic investigations unit opened an investigation into the complaint and summoned members of the IVD for questioning. The complaint alleged that revisions added to the preliminary version of the report in the chapter on corruption in the banking system amounted to "forgery" with the intention of "bring harm to the Tunisian state."

On August 1, 2024, following a hearing with the investigative judge, an investigative judge of the Economic and Financial Judicial Pole at the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered the pre-trial detention of Sihem Bensedrine. The criminal charges against Sihem Bensedrine, which she denies, are based on the claims of the former commissioner who submitted the complaint. The prosecution did not present any concrete evidence to justify the pretrial detention order or the criminal investigation that was opened under such serious charges. Sihem Bensedrine's detention is contrary to the international standards of fairness.

Given the failure thus far of the prosecution to provide concrete evidence of any criminal act that could be related to the changes introduced to the IVD report, the criminal charges against Ms. Sihem Bensedrine, appear to be a form of retaliation for the work she undertook as president of the IVD, and more particularly for the opinions or facts contained in the IVD final report and the prosecutions instigated by IVD against alleged perpetrators.

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

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** October 20, 2024

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** Sihem Bensedrine (She/Her)