

URGENT ACTION

ARTIST JAILED FOR CRITICIZING PRESIDENT

On January 31, 2024, the Monastir court of appeals in Tunisia sentenced artist, Rached Tamboura, to two years in prison on bogus charges for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Rached Tamboura painted a series of graffiti denouncing President Kais Saied's racist comments against sub-Saharan migrants. Police forces arrested Rached Tamboura late during the night between July 17 and 18, 2023, a few hours after he painted the last one. On December 4, 2023, the Monastir Court of First Instance convicted and sentenced him to two years in prison for "committing an offensive act against the president" and "producing and promoting false news with the aim of infringing on the rights of others, harming public security or national defense, or spreading terror among the population" under article 67 of the penal code and article 24 of Decree law 54 respectively. Rached Tamboura is currently imprisoned in the Monastir prison where he is actively protesting his arrest. Tunisian authorities must immediately release Rached Tamboura and quash his conviction and sentence as it is based solely on the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

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 27.24**. 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 write to you to express my grave concern over the ongoing arbitrary detention of artist, **Rached Tamboura**, solely for peacefully voicing his critical opinion through art.

On July 18, 2023, security forces arrested Rached Tamboura after he painted a series of graffiti drawings of President Kais Saied on the wall of the local authorities building.

People have the right to express their dissent and should not be arbitrarily detained for exercising their rights. I therefore urge you to immediately release Rached Tamboura and to quash his conviction and sentence as it is based solely on the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and activism. Pending his release, ensure that he has access to adequate healthcare, in compliance with international standards and medical ethics. Moreover, I call on you to cease your targeted arrests of critics for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Rached Tamboura (28) is an artist and student in Tunisia's Arabic Calligraphy University in Tunis. The police arrested him on the night between July 17 and 18, 2023 after being alerted by the delegation representative in Monastir and detained him for 2 days pending investigation for a series of graffiti drawings that he painted criticizing President Kais Saied after racist remarks he made targeting sub Saharan migrants in February 2023 which [sparked a wave of hatred and racism](#) leading to mass expulsions and attacks against black migrants and Tunisians.

According to his lawyer, upon arresting him, the police interrogated Rached Tamboura without legal representation. Around 4 am on July 18, the prosecution ordered that Rached Tamboura stays in police custody for 48 hours. Rached Tamboura appeared before an investigative judge in the Monastir court of first instance on July 20, 2023, and was interrogated in relation to charges stemming from article 67 of the penal code and decree law 54. The judge issued a pre-trial detention order against Rached Tamboura. On July 26, 2023, the investigative judge concluded the investigation and referred Rached Tamboura to trial for "committing an offensive act against the president" and "producing and promoting false news with the aim of infringing on the rights of others, harming public security or national defense, or spreading terror among the population" under article 67 of the penal code and article 24 of Decree law 54 respectively. On December 4, 2023, the Monastir court of first instance convicted Rached Tamboura on both counts, sentencing him to two years in prison. On January 31, 2024, the Court of Appeals confirmed the initial sentence.

Since President Saied's power grab on July 25, 2021, he claimed emergency powers that he said 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 threatens 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 to which Tunisia is a state party.

Following President Saied's discriminatory remarks in February 2023, hundreds of migrants and refugees were assaulted, evicted, or arbitrarily arrested in total impunity. Since July, security forces rounded up and conducted mass arbitrary expulsions of several thousands of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, including children, to Libya and Algeria. At least 28 people died in the desert region along the Libyan border between July and August.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: May 23, 2024

NAME AND PRONOUN: Rached Tamboura (He/him).