

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ON HUNGER STRIKE

On January 14, 2025, the 14th anniversary of the Tunisian revolution, prominent human rights defender, **Sihem Bensedrine**, announced an open-ended hunger strike to protest her arbitrary detention since August 2024 solely for exercising her human rights. On January 26, she was hospitalized due to health complications. On January 28, her lawyers learned that a Tunis investigative judge has extended her pre-trial detention for another four months on charges of “fraud”, “forgery”, and “abuse of official capacity” in relation to her role exposing alleged corruption as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD). Authorities must immediately and unconditionally 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 to the government official(s) listed. Use the sample letter below as a guide or use your own words.
- [Click here](#) to report your action(s) on **Second UA 76.24**. We share this number with the officials we are trying to persuade.

President of the Republic Kais Saied

Route de la Goulette ; Site archéologique de Carthage,
Tunisie

Email: contact@carthage.tn

Twitter/X: [@TnPresidency](https://twitter.com/TnPresidency)

CC: Tunisian Embassy in the United States

Ambassador Mrs. Hanene Tajouri Bessassi

1515 Massachusetts Avenue,
NW, Washington DC 20005

Email: AT.Washington@Tunisianembassy.org

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern over the ongoing arbitrary detention of prominent human rights defender, **Sihem Bensedrine**, who has been held in arbitrary detention since her arrest on August 1, 2024. On January 14, 2025, Sihem announced an open-ended hunger strike to protest her arbitrary detention. She is detained solely in relation to her work as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) from 2014 to 2018.

Since Sihem started her hunger strike, her health, which was already vulnerable due to pre-existing health conditions, has rapidly deteriorated.

I urge you to immediately and unconditionally 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 adequate access to qualified health professionals. Ensure she also has access to her family, lawyers and is held in conditions that comply with international standards.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Sihem Bensedrine, 74, is a prominent human rights defender, recognized for her independent journalism and [human rights work](#) under former President Ben Ali, who was ousted on January 14, 2011. Since President Kaies Saied's power grab in July 2021, she has been a vocal critic of actions undermining the rule of law and judicial independence in Tunisia. 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, which was established in March 2014 with a four-year mandate (extendable by one year), extended its mandate until the end of 2018 despite [opposition](#) from the parliament who voted against the extension. On December 28, 2018, the Presidency informed the IVD that its report was due three days later 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 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." In the context of this investigation, on November 22, 2022, an investigative judge in the Economic and Financial Judicial Unit questioned Sihem Bensedrine as a witness. On March 2, 2023, the investigating judge changed Sihem Bensedrine's status in the investigation from witness to suspect. On March 7, 2023, the judge issued a travel ban against Sihem Bensedrine. On August 1, 2024, following a hearing, 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 under the same charges. 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 pre-trial detention order or the criminal investigation.

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 Sihem Bensedrine appear to be a form of retaliation for the work she undertook as president of the IVD.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: June 28, 2025

NAME AND PRONOUN: Sihem Bensedrine (she/her).

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-former-head-of-truth-commission-arbitrarily-detained-tunisia-76-24/>