



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Tunisia – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

10 March 2025

Opening of a mass trial against opposition members

On 04.03.25, a mass trial began against around 40 prominent members of the opposition. According to lawyers, relatives and human rights groups, the trial is politically motivated.

The defendants are people from the fields of diplomacy, politics, justice, business and the media who have criticised President Kais Saied. Some of them have been in custody for more than two years, others have fled abroad. The charges include "plotting against state security" and "belonging to a terrorist organisation".

According to lawyers, some of the defendants could face the death penalty if convicted, although this has not been carried out since 1991 due to a moratorium. The judge adjourned the hearings until 11.04.25.¹

31 March 2025

Government announces withdrawal from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights

According to media reports, the government announced on 20.03.25 that it was withdrawing its recognition of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, a decision it had already communicated on 07.03.25.

No reasons for this decision are given in the declaration, and the government has not yet made any other public statements on the matter. Tunisia only recognised the court in 2017 after initially emerging from the Arab Spring as the only successful democracy. The exit will only take effect after a period of one year has expired on 07.03.26.

The withdrawal from the court, which is tasked with enforcing the African Union's Human Rights Charter, essentially means that Tunisian individuals and NGOs will no longer be able to file complaints there against human rights violations by Tunisian authorities, which has happened several times in recent years. For example, in May 2023, the relatives of four imprisoned opposition members, including the leader of the Ennahda party, Rached Ghannouchi, filed a complaint with the African Court demanding their release. In August 2023, the court called on the Tunisian authorities to stop preventing detainees from contacting their lawyers and doctors. Previously, the court had already repeatedly called on Tunisia to withdraw a series of decrees and return to a constitutional democratic order.

Human rights organisations condemned the decision as a further regression of the rule of law under President Kais Saied.²

07 April 2025

Removal of illegal refugee camps announced

The authorities announced on 04.04.25 the start of an evacuation operation for illegally-constructed refugee camps in Sfax Province in which according to estimates more than 20,000 African migrants from sub-Saharan countries are living.

National Guard spokesperson Houssam Eddine Jebabli said that the operation in the Al-Aamra and Jebeniana areas had already begun on Thursday with the removal of the largest camp, which housed 4,000 people. He stressed that the evacuation had been carried out “peacefully without security intervention”, with the participation of Red Crescent teams, the Health Ministry and the Civil Protection agency. Vulnerable people were receiving medical assistance. No information was provided as to where the migrants would be taken after the camps had been cleared. According to media reports, other accommodation was to be allocated to the migrants, distributed across different regions of the country, until their voluntary return to their home countries. There are however also reports according to which migrants had been taken to the Algerian border in the desert and abandoned there.³

14 April 2025

Mass trial of detained opposition members continued, demonstrations in Tunis

On 11.04.25, the trial was resumed of 40 prominent members of the opposition whom the government accuses of crimes against state security and of terrorism, which had recently been adjourned on opening on 04.03.25 (cf. BN of 11.03.25).

Despite the calls from civil society organisations, representatives of the opposition and the defendants themselves, some of whom recently went on hunger strike, the hearing was to be held remotely, with the court quoting security reasons. The defendants’ counsel stress that this is in violation of their clients’ right to a fair trial. Tunisian NGOs and journalists were denied access to the courtroom, and only one family member of each defendant was admitted. Delegates of western embassies and international organisations were permitted to attend.

Two separate protests were staged on 09.04.25 in the capital Tunis in the run-up to the hearing, each attended by several hundred people. Supporters of two opposition parties, the Destur party and the Salvation Front alliance, criticised the trial as a political instrumentalisation of the judiciary under the increasingly authoritarian rule of the head of state Kais Saied, and called for the release of detained opposition activists and anti-government media professionals.⁴

28 April 2025

Anti-government demonstrations after three die in school building collapse

On 14.04.25, a dilapidated wall in a school building collapsed, killing three students in the central town of Mazouna. Civil defence authorities stated that two more individuals had been seriously injured in the incident.

On the next day, hundreds of the town’s residents gathered for protests near the National Guard headquarters, and to demand that those responsible be called to account. They also decried the general neglect and the country’s crumbling, ageing infrastructure. Witnesses reported that the demonstrators had burnt car tyres, blocked roads and demolished a government vehicle. All shops and schools in the area remained closed according to media reports. Demonstrations in Tunis were also attended by hundreds of people, with demonstrators chanting anti-government slogans and calling for the government to step down. The UGTT trade union confederation called for schools nationwide to go on strike in protest at “the authorities’ failure to find real and serious solutions to save public schools”.

A steep increase in anti-government protests has been observed across the board in recent months, which analysts attribute to ‘explosive’ discontent, in particular among young people, as a result of an economic and social crisis

which is getting worse. There have already been several incidents since the beginning of the year in which Tunisians set fire to themselves in public and died. This is reminiscent of the self-immolation of vegetable seller Mohamed Bouazizi on 17.12.10 in Sidi Bouzid, an event which is regarded as having directly triggered the revolution in Tunisia and the Arab Spring.⁵

Sentences handed down in the “conspiracy trial”, long prison sentences for opposition figures

After another day of hearings on 18.04.2025, on 19.04.25 a court in Tunis handed down the sentences in the mass trial of 40 detained opposition figures, as well as anti-government media figures and business people whom prosecutors are accusing of “conspiracy against state security” and “terrorism” (cf. BN of 10.03.25 and 14.04.25). Referring to a report of the state news agency TAP, media initially stated that the accused, some of whom had already been in prison for more than two years whilst some had been able to flee abroad, were sentenced to between 13 and 66 years’ imprisonment. Later reports speak of sentences of between four and 66 years. Furthermore, Ahmed Souab, one of the most prominent defence lawyers in the case, was arrested in the early morning of 21.04.25 after police searched his home. Local media report that he was accused of “threatening to commit terrorist crimes” in a statement made after the sentencing criticising political influence exerted on the judiciary.

President Kais Saied is accused of having undermined judicial independence since he dissolved parliament in 2021 and began ruling by decree. He also abolished the independent Supreme Judicial Council in 2022. According to a report recently published by HRW, Tunisia’s government is increasingly relying on arbitrary detention and politically-motivated prosecutions to intimidate, punish and silence its critics.

According to media reports, the defendants’ lawyers and relatives have already said that they will appeal against the judgment. Anti-government demonstrations took place once more in the capital Tunis in the days following the sentencing.⁶

05 May 2025

Demonstrations in Tunis

Opponents of president Kais Saied protested on the streets of Tunis on 01.05.25 in response to a call from the UGTT trade union and relatives of detained opposition figures, accusing Saied of using the judiciary and police to suppress critics. The rally was attended by members of different political factions. Supporters of president Saied held a counter-rally. Riot police are said to have deployed in large numbers to separate the groups, according to media reports. No clashes were reported.

The Tunisian government has faced large numbers of protests in recent months, focussing on the worsening general economic and social situation, as well as the persecution and detention of opposition figures, media professionals and other persons making critical comments about president Saied (cf. BN of 14.04. and 28.04.25).⁷

12 May 2025

Second “conspiracy trial” against opposition figures opens

A new trial began on 06.05.25 against almost two dozen Tunisian opposition figures accused of conspiracy against state security, only a few weeks after in some cases long prison sentences had been handed down on almost 40 defendants on similar charges in a separate mass trial (cf. BN of 28.04.25). The trial, which has been referred to as “Conspiracy Against State Security 2”, is said to concern 22 defendants, including 83-year-old Ennahdha party leader Rached Ghannouchi, who has been in detention since April 2023 and has already been sentenced to 22 years in prison in another case. According to the court files, former prime minister Youssef Chahed and former chief of staff to the president Nadia Akacha are also among the accused. The defendants are said to be accused amongst other things of terrorism, incitement to murder and “plotting against state internal security”.

The fifth counter-terrorism chamber of Tunis Court of First Instance is said to have ruled to adjourn the hearing to

27 May. A motion for the defendants' release had been rejected, as a source in the judiciary stated to the Tunis Afrique Presse news agency.⁸

02 June 2025

Three environmental activists sentenced to prison

Mohamed Ali Trimi, an activist from the "Stop Pollution" movement and member of the Tunisian Damj association, was sentenced on 28.05.25 to four months' imprisonment. Two other young men, Moez Rahji and Anas Chatouna, were each sentenced to two months' imprisonment. The activists had been demonstrating in Gabès on 23.05.25 against industrial environmental pollution, when Mohamed Ali Trimi intervened in a confrontation between police officers and a citizen, according to information from several organisations which published a statement subsequent to his apprehension.

According to their lawyer Bassem Trifi, president of the Tunisian league of human rights, the three activists were charged on the basis of Articles 79 and 127 of the Criminal Code for attending a gathering regarded as a threat to public order and for assaulting a public official. He once more stressed the peaceful nature of the demonstration. According to Tunisian human rights groups, the convictions of the three environmental activists are a further expression of a more extensive dynamic, namely the wider crackdown on civil movements under president Kais Saied, in particular if they bring up sensitive topics such as the environment or socioeconomic rights. The young men were said to have also faced mistreatment in custody, as a spokesperson for the group stated.⁹

16 June 2025

Prison sentence for opposition politician

A Tunisian court sentenced Abir Moussi, leader of the opposition Free Constitutional Party and a prominent opponent of Tunisian president Kais Saied, on 12.06.25 to two years in prison for criticising the electoral commission. She was sentenced on the basis of presidential decree no. 54, which criminalises the dissemination of "false information".

Moussi has been imprisoned in Manouba women's prison since October 2023, when she was detained at the presidential palace entrance. On 26.05.25, she served a first 16-month prison sentence in proceedings which had also been initiated on the basis of a complaint from the electoral commission. She had additionally been sentenced in August 2024 to two years in prison in a different set of proceedings on the basis of presidential decree no. 54, the sentence subsequently being reduced to one-and-a-half years by an appeal court.

According to information from the Tunisian League of Human Rights from late January 2025, some 400 persons, also including media workers and ordinary citizens, were prosecuted on the basis of decree no. 54, which was issued in September 2022.¹⁰

23 June 2025

Further opposition politicians sentenced to long prison sentences

On 20.06.25, a Tunisian court handed down a 22-year prison sentence in absentia to former president Moncef Marzouki, a fierce critic of president Kais Saied who lives in exile in Paris. He is accused of undermining state security. It is already the third time Marzouki has been convicted, after he had been sentenced to eight years' detention in the previous year, and previously to four years' detention in various other cases. Four other defendants in the trial, including his former adviser Imed Daimi and former head of the national bar association Abderrazak Kilani, who also live in exile, were also handed the same sentences. The charges stem from a press conference held in Paris during which Marzouki, along with Daimi and Kilani, had sharply criticised state institutions and members of the Tunisian judiciary, according to media reports.

Also on 20.06.25, another court sentenced Sahbi Atig, a senior official in Ennahda, the country's main opposition party, to 15 years in prison on charges of money laundering, his lawyer said.

The judiciary is thus continuing its harsh actions against the political opposition and critics of president Kais Saied. In April, a court sentenced a number of opposition leaders, business people and lawyers to up to 66 years'

imprisonment for conspiracy (cf. BN of 28.04.25). Most opposition party leaders are in prison, including Abir Moussi, head of the Free Destourian Party, who was only recently re-sentenced to two years' detention (cf. BN of 16.06.25), and Rached Ghannouchi, head of the Ennahda party, who was most recently sentenced to 22 years' in prison in February 2025. On 03.06.25, an appeal court upheld a ten-year prison sentence against Nouredine Bhiri, former justice minister and leader of the Ennahda party. Bhiri was sentenced on 18.10.24 for a blog post in which he called for protests on the anniversary of the January revolution.¹¹

Amnesty International: repression of trade union and environmental protests has increased

According to a report published on 17.06.25, over the past five years the authorities have increasingly targeted people from marginalised and impoverished communities who had peacefully protested or taken industrial action against socioeconomic and ecological irregularities against the background of a rising cost of living and a worsening environmental crisis. Investigations had hence been initiated in this context against 90 people between February 2020 and January 2025, 16 of whom had been arrested and detained for periods ranging between three days and 20 months. The authorities have been justifying their actions in this regard by using vague "obstruction of work" charges in accordance with Articles 136 and 107 of the Criminal Code.¹²

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