



## Joint Statement

Our organizations express their strongest condemnation following the conviction, on October 31, 2025, of Tunisian lawyer and former magistrate Ahmed Souab, who was sentenced to five years in prison and three years of administrative control by the Tunis First Instance Court.

Ahmed Souab, 68, was prosecuted under Tunisia’s anti-terrorism legislation on charges of “forming and organizing a terrorist group” and “spreading false information,” respectively under Organic Law No. 2015-26 of 7 August 2015 and Decree-Law No. 54 of 2022.

Mr. Souab was tried in extremely brief proceedings — the hearing lasting less than ten minutes. He was not physically present at the hearing, having refused to appear by videoconference, a mode of appearance he considered incompatible with the proper exercise of his right to a defense. Despite objections from Mr. Souab’s lawyers present in the courtroom, who argued that, in the name of the right to a fair trial and to a defence, he should be entitled to appear in the courtroom in person and present his defence, assisted by counsel of his choosing, the Court disregarded these concerns, proceeded without hearing him or his lawyers, and retired after approximately seven minutes to deliberate and deliver its decision.

This conviction is not an isolated event, it occurred within a broader context of erosion of the rule of law in Tunisia: instrumentalization of justice, attacks on judicial independence, and an increasing use of exceptional procedures against political opponents and human rights defenders.

As a former administrative judge turned lawyer, Ahmed Souab has long been known for his commitment to judicial independence and the defense of fundamental freedoms, and in June 2025 received the Ebru Timtik Award in recognition of his outstanding commitment and sacrifice to defend the right to a fair trial. He has represented dismissed magistrates and political prisoners and publicly denounced the pressures exerted on the judiciary in the so-called “plot against state security” case. His arrest in April 2025 followed his public

denunciations of these pressures.

We recall that lawyers' freedom, judicial independence, and the right to a fair trial are not political choices or circumstances, but obligations arising from international law and professional legal standards, including in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, to which Tunisia is a party, as well as the Tunisian Constitution.

Ahmed Souab's case is of great consequence, not just for the individual but for the legal profession in itself. It raises critical questions about lawyers' ability to exercise their profession freely, the effectiveness of the right to a fair trial, and the independence of the judiciary, all of which are essential pillars of democracy. The sentencing of a lawyer committed to defending these principles and rights, following an expedited procedure with insufficient fair trial guarantees, sends a worrying signal to the legal community and Tunisian society as a whole.

**Our organizations call on the Tunisian authorities to:**

- Immediately and unconditionally quash the conviction of Ahmed Souab and guarantee his immediate release;
- End their assault on the independent legal profession and respect and ensure that lawyers, like all persons, are able to exercise their fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression.

Our organizations finally wish to recall that: "When a lawyer is attacked, justice itself is attacked." Our organizations renew their unconditional support and full solidarity with Ahmed Souab, as well as with all lawyers in Tunisia who, in the exercise of their profession, face reprisals for defending human rights and the rule of law.