



General Assembly

Distr.: General
4 March 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-eighth session

24 February–4 April 2025

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status*

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 January 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Human Rights Situation in Tunisia

The Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience is providing this submission on behalf of the representatives of detained Tunisian opposition leaders, whose fundamental rights are being violated by Tunisian authorities, including Rached Ghannouchi, Nouredine Bhiri, Said Ferjani, Ghazi Chaouachi, Chaima Issa, Ridha Belhaj, Bechir Akremi, and Issam Chebbi.

Since Kaïs Saïed invoked the constitution in July 2021 to assume full control of the state, Tunisian opposition leaders have been systematically targeted to dismantle political pluralism, with labels such as “conspirators,” “terrorists” and “traitors to the nation” used against them. The repression of political dissidents intensified further in October 2024, as Kaïs Saïed sought re-election for a new five-year term, with Tunisian authorities actively targeting several opponents in the lead-up to the presidential election.(1)

Concurrently, following his speech in February 2023, sub-Saharan migrants have been subjected to racist rhetoric and widespread violence, which has escalated significantly in recent months. The Tunisian government continues to enforce policies that systematically target sub-Saharan migrants, including arbitrary arrests, racial discrimination, collective expulsions, torture and gender-based violence.

Human Rights Violations Targeting Political Dissidents and Human Rights Defenders

In the recent run-up to the 2024 election, Tunisian authorities exerted significant pressure on the president’s potential opponents, imposing stricter candidacy requirements and creating substantial barriers for candidates to submit their applications, such as stringent proxy rights. These have resulted, for instance in Ghazi Chaouachi, former Secretary-General of the Social Democratic Party Attayar, being prohibited from standing(2).

Of the 17 individuals who declared their intention to run for the presidency, 14 were either arrested or disqualified on questionable grounds—the Independent High Authority for Elections (Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections—ISIE), which has been under the president’s control since 2022, approved only three candidates, including Kaïs Saïed.

In response, a coalition of 30 NGOs denounced the arbitrary detention of candidates, further condemning the electoral authority’s loss of independence and the monopolisation of civic space(3).

Opposition in Tunisia remains heavily curtailed, with the regime targeting not only political opponents but also sub-Saharan migrants, NGO representatives advocating for their rights, lawyers, and media outlets that question existing policies.

Mary Lawlor, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, condemned Kaïs Saïed’s remarks calling NGOs workers “traitors and foreign agents”. She expressed alarm over their detention without trial, in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions, describing it as a grave violation of the international human rights conventions ratified by Tunisia. Lawlor also urged Tunisian authorities to create a safe environment for legitimate human rights work, particularly that which is free from intimidation. She stressed the importance of ending hate speech and threatening smear campaigns(4).

In January 2025, Human Rights Watch alarmingly reported that “As of November, over 80 people were detained on political grounds or for exercising their fundamental rights, including political opponents, activists, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and social media users”(5).

In this context, the representatives of detained Tunisian opposition leaders urge Tunisian authorities to end unlawful arrests and halt the crackdown on civil society.

They call on Tunisian authorities to guarantee the release of political detainees who have been unlawfully detained.

Furthermore, the representatives of detained Tunisian opposition leaders call on the United Nations and all Member States to ensure the protection of their fundamental rights and to prevent the persecution of political opponents. In this regard, Members States should call on the International Criminal Court, of which Tunisia is a Member State, to investigate the crimes committed.

Human Rights Violations Targeting Sub-Saharan Migrants

In July 2023, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in a statement issued under its early warning and urgent action procedure, declared that speeches by Kaïs Saïed had incited an unacceptable rise in violence and crimes(6). The experts expressed concerns over remarks made by Tunisia’s Head of State, alleging that “hordes of illegal migrants” arriving from other African countries were part of “a criminal plan to change the composition of the demographic landscape of Tunisia” and were the source “of violence, unacceptable crimes, and practices”.

Following the violence-triggering racist remarks, the UN Committee reported a significant increase of the number of arbitrary actions against sub-Saharan migrants such as forced evictions and arbitrary detentions.

A large majority of migrants share the same story of “...an arbitrary arrest in Tunisia on land or at sea after an attempted crossing, followed by collective expulsion to neighbouring Libya”(7). In January 2025, Frontex reported a sharp 59% drop in the number of asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean from Tunisia last year; however this decline is directly attributable to the violence and intensity of operations in which migrants are intercepted at sea(8).

The treatment of sub-Saharan migrants reveals a troubling pattern of violent interceptions at sea, which include pullbacks by the Tunisian Garde Nationale before deporting them to the no-mans-land zone near the Libyan border, where they are left to die in inhumane conditions without access to food and water.

On 9 July 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, revealed that a mass grave had recently been discovered in the desert area at the Tunisian border. According to Turk, “The dehumanisation of these individuals, who are in a vulnerable situation, continues at the hands of both state and non-state actors, often working in collusion”(9).

In addition to sea pullbacks and deportation to the desert, reports indicated that the military and police subject migrants to numerous acts of violence, “According to the UNHCR, 30% of asylum seekers pre-registering in September 2023 were suffering from injuries linked to torture and ill-treatment suffered during their migratory journeys”(10).

The Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights has highlighted sexual violence as “... the price many women pay for crossing borders within Africa as well as for crossing the Mediterranean”(11). The Forum also emphasised that sexual violence is not exclusive to women, although it disproportionately affects them.(12) Similarly, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) stated, “Several cases of sexual assault during expulsions were confirmed during a dozen interviews, characterised by touching. Several women were allegedly subjected to invasive searches constituting sexual assaults by police officers during expulsions and arrests in Sfax”. The OMCT also found that forced displacement in border areas has significantly increased the risk of sexual violence, particularly for women.(13)

These practices are being carried out by Tunisian state bodies or under their supervision as part of a clear policy targeting sub-Saharan migrants that reflects the xenophobic and authoritarian nature of the regime.

Therefore, the representatives of detained Tunisian opposition leaders call on Tunisian authorities to protect the fundamental rights of both Tunisians and sub-Saharan migrants.

They urge the authorities to end the violence against sub-Saharan migrants, particularly unlawful arrests and collective expulsions.

Furthermore, they call on the United Nations and all Member States to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of sub-Saharan migrants and to hold the perpetrators accountable. In this regard, Member States should call on the International Criminal Court, of which Tunisia is a Member State, to investigate the crimes committed.

-
- (1) Human Rights Watch, World report 2025, January 2025.
 - (2) L.BLAISE, Tunisie. Une élection sans opposition pour Kaïs Saïed, Orient XXI, 26 August 2024.
 - (3) Tunisia: Four presidential candidates jailed and barred from elections, Middle East Eye, 6 August 2024.
 - (4) Tunisia: UN expert alarmed by arrests and smear campaigns against migrant rights defenders, UN Press Release, 1 October 2024;
 - (5) Human Rights Watch, World report 2025, ibid.
 - (6) Racist rhetoric in Tunisia must stop, independent UN experts warn, UN News, 4 April 2023.
 - (7) L.CARRETERO, Migrants in Tunisia transferred to Libyan prisons, InfoMigrants, 15 December 2023.
 - (8) State Trafficking: Expulsion and sale of migrants from Tunisia to Libya , Researchers X, Border Forensics, On Borders, January 2025.
 - (9) “Peace and stability in Libya go hand in hand with human rights”, says High Commissioner, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 9 July 2024.
 - (10) Torture Roads Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia, OMCT, October 2023.
 - (11) Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights, Violence against sub-Saharan migrant women in Tunisia, 12 December 2019.
 - (12) Tunisian Forum for Social and Economic Rights, ibid.
 - (13) Torture Roads Mapping of violations suffered by people on the move in Tunisia, ibid.