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TUNISIA: ICJ Releases Report on Attacks on Judges and Lawyers

The Centre for the Independence of Judges and Lawyers (CIJL) of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today issued a report on Tunisia in which it concluded that the independence of the judiciary is tenuous and that human rights lawyers are consistently harassed and persecuted. Two CIJL/ICJ fact-finding missions which were to have investigated these problems and engaged in a dialogue with the Tunisian Government were not allowed entry into the country. Nevertheless, the CIJL/ICJ was able to secure interviews outside of Tunisia with several Tunisian lawyers and human rights defenders.

The situation of human rights lawyers in Tunisia is dismal: they and sometimes even their children are physically assaulted; their telephone lines are tapped; they are followed; their offices are broken into and they are often denied access to their clients and their clients' files thereby making it virtually impossible to mount a proper defence.

The Council of the Bar Association as well as its president are currently being prosecuted for calling upon members to exercise their lawful right to strike in protest at grossly unfair legal proceedings. During these proceedings, detainees were assaulted by police in court. Judges who dare question the state of affairs, such as the former Judge Mokhtar Yahyaoui are summarily dismissed from their posts.

Independent human rights NGOs are prevented from officially establishing themselves and suffer routine harassment.

The ICJ calls yet again upon the Government of Tunisia to respect internationally recognised principles of judicial independence and freedom of association in line with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*, the *UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary*, the *UN Principles on the Role of Lawyers*, and the *UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups, and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*.

Note: For further information please contact Linda Besharaty-Movaed at 41 22 979 38 09, and refer to the **ICJ's Final Report**.

The ICJ is an international non-governmental organisation comprising sixty of the world's most eminent jurists and has a worldwide network of national sections and affiliated organisations

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