



Tunisia: Authorities must immediately release hundreds of persons detained solely for exercising their fundamental freedoms and investigate reports of human rights violations by security forces

9 March 2021

Tunisian authorities must respect the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, and stop the systematic targeting of protesters, lawyers and civil society activists, said the ICJ today.

Since the outbreak of social justice protests on 15 January 2021, Tunisian security forces have systematically targeted [protesters](#), including [minors](#), [lawyers](#) and [civil society activists](#).

Over the last weeks, [reports](#) of abuses at the hands of the Tunisian security forces have included: [hundreds of arbitrary arrests; deaths in custody in disputed circumstances; physical assaults; rape and death threats](#); and refusing detainees access to legal counsel. While to date more than half of the people arrested since the beginning of the protests have been released, only a few prosecutions arising from the security forces' systematic campaign of arrests have taken place, and hundreds of people are still in custody awaiting to be brought before a judge. According to the information available to the ICJ, individuals are being prosecuted under different charges, including ["insulting the police"](#) and ["abuse of morals"](#).

"The systematic targeting of peaceful protesters and the other abuses that we have witnessed in recent weeks are clear instances of the wider impunity that Tunisian security forces have continued to enjoy over decades", said Said Benarbia, the ICJ's MENA Programme Director. "The Tunisian authorities should immediately halt these practices by reforming the country's security legislation and open independent and impartial investigations into these abuses."

To date, Tunisia has [failed](#) to adopt a comprehensive reform of its security legislation in line with the Constitution and the country's obligations under international human rights law and standards.

As reported on multiple occasions, investigations into reports of human rights violations by Tunisian security forces have rarely led to successful prosecutions of perpetrators in the past. Moreover, while since 2018 prosecutions arising from police abuses committed under the previous regime have started before the Specialized Criminal Chambers, numerous [obstacles](#) continue to affect the progress of trials, and no verdict has been delivered to date.

"It is time for the Tunisian authorities to abide by the Constitution and international human rights law and standards and commit to a complete end to the security forces' oppressive practices", said Said Benarbia, "Only by undertaking a full review of Tunisia's security laws and bringing perpetrators of human rights violations to justice will the country be able to break this cycle of abuses and ensure full respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights."

Contact:

Said Benarbia, Director, ICJ Middle East and North Africa Programme, t: +41-22-979-3817; e: said.benarbia@icj.org

Valentina Cadelo, Legal Adviser, ICJ Middle East and North Africa Programme, e: valentina.cadelo@icj.org

Asser Khattab, Research and Communications' Officer, ICJ Middle East and North Africa Programme, e: [asser.khattab\(a\)icj.org](mailto:asser.khattab@icj.org)