

Tunisia: Authorities must immediately release Rached Ghannouchi amid severe fair trial violations and serious health concerns

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Tunisian authorities must release prominent opposition politician Rached Ghannouchi, quash his convictions and end the politically motivated prosecutions against him marred by significant due process violations, Amnesty International said today. The organization is also urgently calling for him to receive access to adequate healthcare pending his release.

The 84-year-old leader of the Ennahdha party and former Speaker of Parliament has been held in arbitrary detention since his arrest in April 2023 and has been subjected to numerous politically motivated prosecutions. Authorities have initiated at least 12 separate criminal cases against Rached Ghannouchi, resulting in multiple convictions and cumulative prison sentences of 107 years, in addition to a life sentence handed down on 1 June 2026 in the “Secret Apparatus” case.

“The latest judgment against Rached Ghannouchi represents the first life sentence imposed on a major political leader since Tunisia’s 2011 revolution and marks a significant escalation in the authorities’ misuse of the criminal justice system against opposition figures,” said Heba Morayef, Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.

“The successive trials and prosecutions against him are emblematic of the lengths the authorities are willing to go to in order to suppress political dissent. They also show how deeply politicized the justice system has become with little regard for fair trial rights.”

Amnesty International’s calls echo the findings of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) in Opinion No. 63/2025, which declared Rached Ghannouchi’s detention arbitrary under international law, citing the lack of legal basis, violations of fair trial standards, and discrimination based on political opinion.

Rached Ghannouchi’s various convictions followed proceedings severely undermined by procedural irregularities, including denial of access to legal counsel, trials held in his absence without notification, and reliance on doctored videos, anonymous witnesses, and unsubstantiated claims, without allowing his defence to challenge the evidence. His prosecutions – ranging from speech offences for public remarks protected by freedom of expression to finance offences relating to a publicly disclosed 2016 charitable donation to the Tunisian Red Crescent – represent a clear violation of his rights to freedom of expression, association, fair trial and political participation.

Rached Ghannouchi’s continued imprisonment has been further compounded by a drastic deterioration of his health. He suffers from Parkinson’s disease, sleep apnea, and severe leg pain, which were exacerbated by being held in unventilated prison cells during heatwaves exceeding 50°C. He lost consciousness twice during a legal consultation on 17 July and was hospitalized five times between July and August 2026, during his hospital stays authorities arbitrarily banned visits from his family and legal team.

“The case of Rached Ghannouchi illustrates how, under President Kais Saied, the country

has witnessed a severe rollback of human rights, facilitated by the erosion of judicial independence. While President Saied makes repeated public accusations that government critics and political opponents are 'traitors' and 'terrorists', we have witnessed the judiciary becoming increasingly subordinate to the executive's political interests," said Heba Morayef.

The organization reiterates that Tunisian authorities must immediately release Rached Ghannouchi, stop misusing the justice system to target opposition figures, and uphold the country's international human rights obligations.

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