

PRESS RELEASE

Police brutality post 25/07: impunity once again?

October 23ed, 2021, Tunis

On the night of 21 October 2021, in the heart of downtown Tunis, Badr Baabou, human rights advocate and head of Damj, the Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality, was brutally assaulted by two police officers.

On his way back home, Badr was attacked by two police officers, who first confiscated his personal belongings, including his identification documents, computer, and mobile phone. His assailants then delivered multiple severe blows to his body and face, as seen by the images taken post-assault¹. These heinous acts of cruelty and brutality were accompanied by statements of hatred, vindictiveness, and discrimination: "This is what happens to those who insult the police! This is what happens when you file a complaint against the police!"

These are not the first instances of this nature, nor are they an isolated incident or a simple blunder by overzealous police personnel. Human rights and individual liberties defenders are being systematically and deliberately repressed. Journalists, feminists, and activists for gender and sexual equality are paying a high price, as the case of Arroi Baraket, "guilty of being a journalist and feminist," demonstrates².

The ongoing impunity of law enforcement agents has unquestionably been bolstered since July 25, 2021, the day President Kais Saied declared a state of exception. It disregards all of his presidential pledges in relation to safeguarding rights and freedoms and not backtracking to pre-July 25 conditions. Departure from this era is unlikely if the institutions that purports to have respect for the rule of law remain silent and even condone widespread acts of police brutality³.

Thus, the signatory collectives, coalitions, associations and organizations:

¹ See the video published by DAMJ : <https://www.facebook.com/damj.tunisie/videos/4449314395114223/>

² See the press release signed by several CSOs: <http://adltn.org/ar/lescalade-des-charges-contre-arroi-baraket-est-injustifiee-et-doit-etre-rejetee/>

³ As a reminder, this serious aggression occurs exactly one year after enormous protests against police protection laws, which resulted in the detention, brutalization, and prosecution of numerous civil society activists and human rights defenders. Among these defenders are numerous Damj members who are still facing charges for the contempt of state officials (Article 125 of the Tunisian Penal Code).

- Reiterate their unwavering support for activist Badr Baabou and all human rights activists and defenders who face harassment and abuse as a result of their activity and dedication to human rights and freedoms, as well as for any causes they defend and support;
- Strongly condemn the terrible attack on Badr Baabou, as well as other individuals, citizens and non-citizens, who have exercised their constitutionally protected rights and freedoms; and categorically reject the characterization of this type of violation as just an "isolated case";
- Demand an immediate end to the regime of impunity and the oppressive powers of law enforcement and security forces deployed to violate freedoms and liberties;
- Request that the Public Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance in Tunis initiate an inquiry promptly;
- Provide Badr Baabou with all essential help for his protection and security, and establish a defense committee comprised of several militant lawyers in charge of his legal representation in court;
- Reiterate their commitment to preserving and defending the Revolution's achievements, particularly the basic rights and liberties guaranteed by the 2014 Constitution;
- Require the Republic's Presidency, by virtue of the power vested in it, to preserve its pledges to rights and freedoms;
- Demand fundamental reforms of the security and judicial systems, as well as accountability of all parties, and hold donors responsible for their roles in the execution of these reforms.

Faced with the arbitrary character of the security system and the authorities' complicit silence, the undersigned collectives, coalitions, associations, and organizations welcome journalists, diverse components of civil society, and all progressive forces in the country to a press conference on 27 October at 10 am at the SNJT offices, to shed light on the pervasiveness of post-25/07 police infractions and the ensuing totalitarian abuses.

Signatory collectives, coalitions, associations, and organizations:

1. Collectif Civil pour les Libertés Individuelles, CCLI
2. Observatoire pour la Défense du Droit à la Différence en Tunisie, O3DT
3. Alliance pour la Sécurité et la Liberté, ASL
4. La Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme, LTDH
5. L'Association Tunisienne pour la Défense des Libertés Individuelles, ADLI
6. L'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, ATFD
7. L'association tunisienne pour la justice et l'égalité, DAMJ
8. Association Beity
9. Association du Droit à la Différence, ADD
10. Avocats Sans Frontières, ASF
11. Initiative Mawjoudin pour l'Égalité
12. Le Groupe Tawhida Ben Cheikh
13. EuroMed Droits
14. DIGNITY - Dansk Institute Against Torture
15. ATL MST SIDA TUNIS
16. L'Organisation Mondiale Contre la Torture, OMCT
17. Amid Vision Organisation
18. L'Union nationale des femmes tunisiennes, Délégation Kairouan
19. Attalaki pour la liberté et l'égalité
20. Asda Djerba
21. Association 7ème dimension
22. Danseurs Sud Citoyens, DSC
23. By L'Hwem
24. Association Mada
25. Association Southcom
26. Association tunisienne de l'action culturelle