

Civil society rejects police approaches in dealing with popular protests

In recent weeks, Tunisia has been living in a state of social upheaval because of the policies of a government that did not fulfil the expectations of Tunisian women and men. The Government failed to confront corruption and instead established a policy of impunity and inequality before the law. It replaced political solutions with brutal security and judicial approaches reminiscent of the last days of the Mechichi government.

Legitimate social movements of active youth in a number of major neighborhoods of Tunis (Tadhamon, Al Intilaqa, Sidi Hssin, El-Kram, Cité Ezzouhour...) and in other cities in the interior (El Hamma, Zarzis, Moknine, Nabeul, Bizerte...) have expressed and requested the virtues of the Revolution - freedom, dignity, justice and equality. The protests reflect an outrage at the authority's failure to find fair and effective alternatives to failed and unjust development policies. They are an expression of resistance towards an authority that systematically resorts to coercive security and justice responses to harass and repress protesters with brutal methods such as the use of teargas in entire neighborhoods, violent police raids on cafes and homes, massive arbitrary arrests, kidnapping of activists, imprisonment of dozens through unjust sentences based on undemocratic, outdated and colonial laws and beylical decrees. These accusations are fomented to weaken popular movements and to intimidate activists.

The signatory organizations, associations and unions express their total rejection of the way police and justice was implicated in the following cases:

The kidnapping of the activist Saif Ayadi following the support he provided to the family of the martyr Malek Sellimi, victim of police violence in the Ettadhamen district in an attempt to silence witnesses, acquit the guilty security officers and ensure their impunity. The search of the house of the activist Awsse Saadi, imprisoned without clear charges and the kidnapping and arrest of the student activist Ghaith Marzouk in one of the cafes of Jbal Lahmer:

The persistence in prosecuting journalists such as Ghassan Ben Khalifa, Arwa Baraket and Khalifa El Guesmi and the judicial harassment against opponents of the bill criminalizing attacks on the armed forces;

The unfair trial of demonstrators from Mornag following their protests against the state's treatment of Mohamed Amine Dridi, a young fruit seller who committed suicide upon the confiscation of his goods by municipal officers;

The police raids in houses of protesters in the neighborhoods of Ettadhamen, Al Intilaqa and Al Kabbaria, and their arrest for investigation - in retaliation and in order to prevent them from continuing their civil and peaceful demonstration;

The excessive display of armed forces around the court of first instance of Ben Arous during the trial of the killers of Omar Laabidi, the prohibition of dozens of citizens from participating in the organized demonstrations during the hearings, the abduction of some of them and the abuses against some members of the "T3allem 3oum" campaign; these restrictions have affected several members of the defense committee;

The trial of 36 activists of the campaign "Manish Msabb" from the region of Agareb-Sfax in order to shut down the movement that demands fair environmental policies in a city facing the dangers of pollution and heading towards slow death ;

The harassment and prosecution of lawyers in contradiction to the principles of fair trial;

The prosecution of numerous youth - such as Wassef Derbali - following opinions expressed on social media and the defamation and incitement against activists and demonstrators thereby violating their right to dignity and privacy ;

On the basis of the above, the national and international civil organizations express:

- Their entire support to all peaceful demonstrations against the policies of marginalization, impoverishment and starvation, and against the manipulation of the current authority undermining the hopes and expectations of the Revolution by adopting the same backward approaches of the last decade and the years of dictatorship ;

- Their support to citizen and youth movements to continue their struggles, while respecting public and private property, in their attempt at remaining a positive influential force on the system of governance and in pushing for development policies that fight corruption and promote rights and freedoms ;

- Their denouncement of the excessive use of force, of arbitrary arrests and of attacks against activists in lieu of treating the protests positively by understanding their root causes and hearing the views of the protesters ;

The signatories:

- hold the authorities accountable for the consequences of their failed economic and social policies that produce exclusive development programs causing further unemployment, poverty and extreme inequality. They call the authorities to revise them, including through fair development decisions and an effective fight against corruption ;

- call for the immediate release of all detainees, to stop prosecuting them and to guarantee the right of expression and protest, paid with the blood of the martyrs of the Revolution ;

- announce that they begin -in coordination with all relevant bodies and structures- to provide legal support to all those who are arbitrarily referred to justice, in line with their belief in the right to a fair trial and in their refusal of the instrumentalization of justice to settle accounts with youth and human rights movement ;

The signatory organizations also announce that a press conference will be held on Tuesday, October 25, 2022, at 10:00 am at the headquarters of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT), to present their position on the recent demonstrations, the political and security situation and announce the forms of actions that they will take during this period of crisis.

Signatory organizations :

- Forum Tunisien des Droits Economiques et Sociaux
- Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens
- Ligue Tunisienne des droits de l'Homme
- Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates
- Union Générale des Etudiants de Tunisie
- Comité National pour la Défense des Libertés et de la Démocratie
- Al Bawsala
- DAMJ
- Association Tunisienne pour la Défense des Libertés Individuelles
- Aswat Nissa
- Union des Diplômés Chômeurs
- Association Droit à la Différence
- Intersection pour les Droits et les Libertés
- Observatoire National pour la Défense du Caractère Civil de l'Etat
- Association Free Sight
- Association Calam
- Organisation Contre la Torture en Tunisie
- Coalition Tunisienne Contre la Peine de Mort
- Association Karama pour les Droits et les Libertés
- Comité de Défense des Libertés et des Droits de l'Homme en Tunisie
- Association Moussawet
- Association Tunisienne pour l'Egalité, la Justice Sociale et la Dignité Humaine
- Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche sur le Développement
- Association Beity
- Réseau Tunisien pour la Justice Transitionnelle
- Dignity & Rehabilitation Coalition
- L'Observatoire Tunisien des Lieux de Détention
- Legal Agenda
- Association Tunisienne de l'Action Culturelle
- Association Insaf
- Association Nachaaz

- EuroMed Droits
- Avocats Sans Frontières
- Article 19
- Psychologues du Monde – Tunisie