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### **Tunisia: Alarming deterioration in health of human rights defender Ahmed Souab**

Front Line Defenders expresses grave concern for the wellbeing and physical integrity of human rights defender and lawyer, **Ahmed Souab**, who is currently detained at El Mornaguia Prison in Tunisia. The organisation is alarmed by the serious deterioration in his health, which has included two severe nosebleeds, one of which led to loss of consciousness.

[Ahmed Souab](#) is a Tunisian lawyer and human rights defender. He is widely renowned for his longstanding commitment to upholding the rule of law, having been a prominent magistrate judge in the Tunisian Administrative Court for decades. As a lawyer, he has continued to defend human rights in Tunisia, remaining vocal in denouncing the erosion of judicial independence and pressures faced by judges.

On 5 January 2026, the human rights defender suffered a severe nosebleed at approximately 10:00 AM and was attended to by prison medical staff. Later, at around 2:00 PM, he experienced a severe nosebleed that caused him to lose consciousness, necessitating intervention by the prison's chief doctor and a senior official from the prison administration. While medical staff reportedly provided care to the best of their ability, the exact cause of the repeated bleeding remains undetermined due to the limitations of the prison's medical facilities. Ahmed Souab, now aged 70, also suffers from chronic heart conditions, increasing the necessity of immediate action and adequate medical attention.

On 31 October 2025, Ahmed Souab was sentenced to five years in prison and three years of administrative supervision by the Tunis Court of First Instance for 'forming and organising a terrorist group' (Organic Law No. 2015-26 of 7 August 2015) and 'spreading false information' (Decree-Law No. 54 of 2022). Although Ahmed Souab's legal team filed an appeal soon after the Court's verdict, the case file has not yet been sent to the Court of Appeal, and the prosecution has not recorded the appeal documents.

The human rights defender had been tried in summary proceedings that lasted less than ten minutes. He was absent from the hearing after refusing to appear by videoconference, which he considered incompatible with his right to defence. The Court ignored his lawyers' arguments that he should be allowed to appear in person and present his defence with the lawyer of his choice. Instead, the hearing proceeded without hearing from Ahmed Souab or his lawyers. The Court withdrew after only a few minutes to deliberate and deliver its decision.

The human rights defender had initially been arrested under the Tunisian anti-terrorism legislation on 21 April 2025 and was detained for 48 hours without being able to contact his lawyer or his family. The request for release filed by his defence team was rejected by the investigating judge on 28 April 2025 who subsequently referred his case to court.

The arrest and subsequent prosecution of Ahmed Souab are linked to a statement he made in April 2025 at a media briefing organised by lawyers involved in a [high profile trial](#). Having acted as a defence lawyer, the defender criticised the existence of procedural violations and executive

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interference in the functioning of the justice system during the trial. Following this, a campaign was orchestrated against him on social media, distorting his statement. As a lawyer known for using metaphors to explain complex legal situations, the defender had said that “a sword of Damocles hung over the heads of judges”, referring to the pressure placed on them which undermines the principle of judicial independence.

Front Line Defenders is alarmed by the reported irregularities and lack of fair trial guarantees in Ahmed Souab’s case. While the public prosecutor acted speedily to pursue charges against him for metaphorical statements, his appeal has not been referred to the Court of Appeal, and no appeal documents have been recorded by the public prosecutor. The organisation believes that the blatant disregard for his human rights and wellbeing indicates that Ahmed Souab’s detention is politically motivated and in retaliation for his legitimate human rights work and peaceful exercise of expression.

Front Line Defenders considers that the continued detention of Ahmed Souab, now in his seventies, in critical health and without access to specialised medical care, gravely endangers his physical integrity and wellbeing.

**Front Line Defenders urges all relevant authorities in Tunisia to:**

1. Immediately transfer Ahmed Souab to a specialised hospital to receive urgent medical care under the supervision of an independent medical team, with public disclosure of his medical condition and treatment;
2. Immediately release Ahmed Souab and quash all the convictions in the politically motivated case fabricated against him;
3. Cease the judicial harassment of human rights defenders in Tunisia and guarantee that they can carry out their legitimate human rights activities without the fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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