

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ON TRIAL

On 24 November 2025, human rights defenders Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Kilani will face criminal trial before the Tunis Court of First Instance, along with four others. Mustapha Djemali, founder and director of the Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR) and Abderrazek Krimi, CTR project manager, have been in arbitrary pre-trial detention since their arrest in May 2024 solely based on carrying out their legitimate work and exercising their right to freedom of association. The CTR, a Tunisian organization and implementing partner of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), provided essential assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia. Tunisian authorities must immediately release Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi and drop all charges against them. Authorities must ensure that human rights defenders are able to freely carry out their work in a safe and enabling environment without any reprisals.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of the Republic Kais Saied

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Your Excellency,

I write to you to express my grave concern over the prosecution of human rights defenders Mustapha Djemali, 81 years old, and Abderrazek Krimi whose trial opened on 16 October with their next hearing scheduled for 24 November 2025. They are facing unfounded charges of “forming an organization” to “assist the clandestine entry” of migrants into Tunisia and “providing them shelter”, offences that carry up to 13 years in prison. During the first court hearing on 16 October, the lawyers of Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi defended their clients’ legitimate work and asked for their provisional release, a request which the judge refused. They also asked for an adjournment of the trial, which was granted for 24 November. Finally, the lawyers requested to summon UNHCR as a witness to confirm that CTR activities were in line with the cooperation agreement between Tunisia and UNHCR which the judge also refused.

The charges against Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi are based solely on the peaceful exercise of their human rights and their legitimate work at the Tunisian Council of Refugees (Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés – CTR), a Tunisian NGO that worked with the Tunisian authorities and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to pre-register asylum seekers and provide essential assistance. Their detention is arbitrary as defending refugee and migrant rights, irrespective of their legal status, including by providing shelter, is not a crime. The authorities are misusing the criminal justice system to criminalize human rights and humanitarian work, contrary to international human rights standards on the rights of human rights defenders, as set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Judicial harassment of human rights defenders is also contrary to the rights to freedom of expression and association guaranteed under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights both of which Tunisia has ratified. Tunisia is a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention which gives refugees the right to identity and travel documents; work, housing, education and relief; and protection from sanction for irregular entry.

I therefore urge you and your government to ensure the immediate release of Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazek Krimi and that all charges against them are dropped. I also call on your government to immediately cease targeted arrests of human rights defenders and allow them to freely carry out their human rights work in a safe and enabling environment without any reprisals.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In early May 2024, the Tunisian government launched a [clampdown](#) against refugees and migrants and civil society organizations defending their rights. On 6 May, in [public remarks](#), President Kais Saied attacked organizations working on migration, accusing them of seeking the "settlement" of migrants and describing them as "traitors" and "[foreign] agents". He stated: "There are networks inside who are connected to networks abroad... Financial transfers are received by... those who falsely claim that they are protecting [migrants], an association, you all know how they posted a tender to shelter these Africans... who are residing [in Tunisia] illegally."

On 7 May, a Tunis prosecutor [announced](#) the opening of an investigation against associations for "abusing their mandate to provide financial support" to irregular migrants. Authorities have since summoned, arrested and investigated the heads, former staff or members of at least 20 organizations. Ten human rights defenders, NGO staff and former local municipality staff who worked with them are in arbitrary pre-trial detention for accusations of supporting irregular migrants or of financial crimes relating to legitimate NGO funding. That same month, the authorities conducted forced evictions of refugees and migrants and convicted landlords for renting apartments to irregular migrants. This crackdown represented one of the latest escalations within [a wider deterioration](#) of refugee and migrant rights since [February 2023](#), marked by racially discriminatory practices and language. This pattern of criminalization of refugee and migrant rights defenders has also been documented in [Europe](#) and [beyond](#).

The Tunisian Council for Refugees (CTR), a Tunisian NGO founded in 2016, which worked with the UNHCR and Tunisian authorities to pre-register asylum seekers and provide essential assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, was among the first organizations targeted. Its founder Mustapha Djemali is a former high-level UNHCR official. On 2 May 2024, in line with local compliance requirements and as part of their regular activities, the CTR published a tender for hotels to shelter asylum seekers and refugees in precarious situations, following a request for assistance from the UNHCR and the region of Sfax. Following its publication, Tunisian media outlets and social media accounts shared screenshots of the tender claiming that civil society was conspiring for the "settlement" of "Africans" or "illegal migrants" in Tunisia, often using xenophobic and racist language. On 3 May, the police raided the CTR office in Tunis, arrested its director Mustapha Djemal and placed him in custody. On 4 May, the police arrested and placed Abderrazak Krimi, project manager at the CTR, in custody. Police officials interrogated the two HRDs about the CTR's funding, the activities of the organization with regards to irregular migrants, and the call for tenders. Following their arrest, the CTR suspended its activities, triggering critical disruptions in access to asylum procedures and basic services including health assistance, shelter and child protection.

On 7 May, an investigating judge at the Tunis Court of First Instance ordered their pre-trial detention for six months pending investigation for "forming an alliance or an organization" in order to "plan, facilitate, assist, mediate, or organize by any means, even without profit, the clandestine entry of a person into Tunisian territory" and "providing them with shelter" based on Articles 38, 39 and 41 of Law 40 of 1975 relating to Passports and Travel Documents. These charges lacking legal clarity fail to include elements of financial or material gain or exploitation which characterize human smuggling and trafficking and do not exempt human rights and humanitarian support, as required by the UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Trafficking and Smuggling Protocols.

The judge renewed their detention for four months in October 2024 and in February 2025. Under Tunisian law, it cannot be renewed a third time. The judge has rejected at least four of their lawyer's requests for conditional release. He froze both bank accounts of Mustapha Djemali and Abderrazak Krimi and the account of the CTR pending investigation. On 18 March 2025, an expert report mandated by the judge to investigate their personal bank accounts and the account of the CTR was submitted to the court; it did not identify any irregularities. On 25 March, the judge stated during an investigation hearing session "You brought Black people into Tunisia illegally and you feed and shelter them, Tunisian history and laws will make you pay for it," raising concerns as to fairness of the trial. On 30 April, the investigative judge closed the investigation into the case and on 3 June, the indictment chamber ruled in favour of moving the case to trial.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French and English
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 10 May 2026
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Mustapha Djemali (He/Him) and Abderrazak Krimi (He/Him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde30/9312/2025/en/>

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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