



Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Tunisia – January to June 2023

30 June 2023

02 January 2023

State of emergency extended

According to the Tunisian Official Gazette (Journal Officiel de la République Tunisienne – JORT), President Kais Saied has extended the state of emergency until 30.01.23. This gives the authorities additional powers, independent of the judiciary, such as banning official meetings, imposing house arrests and controlling the media and press.

Official election results announced – criticism of election authorities

According to official data provided by the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE), 11.22% of eligible citizens participated in the parliamentary election held on 17.12.22 (cf. BN of 19.12.22). In the election, in which it was possible to vote not for parties, but for individual candidates, only 21 persons prevailed. A run-off ballot is therefore scheduled for 20.01.23, which will affect 131 of the total 161 constituencies. The final results are to be announced on 03.03.23.

During the election held on 27.12.22, Tunisian human rights groups accused the election authorities of threatening the freedom of the press. They said the ISIE was attacking the freedom of expression, censoring media organisations and thus violating the law, as it had filed a lawsuit the previous week against several bloggers and media outlets for alleged offences during a referendum on a new constitution. On 29.12.22, journalists therefore protested against what they saw as growing repression and intimidation of the press since President Kais Saied seized power on 25.07.21 (cf. BN of 26.07.21). The demonstration was organised by the national journalists' union SNJT.

09 January 2023

Case against LGBTIQ activist dropped

As reported in press articles, an appeals court ruled on 02.01.23 that the prosecution of a queer activist in a high-profile LGBTIQ case was legally flawed. The NGO Damj (Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality), which is involved in the queer community, and a judiciary spokesperson stated that the charges had been dropped due to a procedural error. The case dates back to 2015, when six students were charged with sodomy, sentenced to three years in prison and banned from the Kairouan region.

06 February 2023

State of emergency extended

Various media reported on 01.02.23 that the state of emergency, which has been in force since 2015, has been extended until the end of the year. It was supposed to end on 30.01.23. Under the state of emergency, measures can be enacted to stop assemblies and demonstrations, impose curfews and crack down on media organisations.

According to human rights groups, the restrictions constitute violations of human rights because they are often abused.

13 February 2023

Arrests of political opponents

On 12.02.23, various media reported that both an opposition politician and two political activists had been arrested the previous weekend. They were reportedly accused of plotting against state security. In addition, two former judges were reportedly arrested. They are among those who were dismissed by President Kais Saied last year (cf. BN of 13.06.22). The arrests are reportedly related to the murder of the political activist Chokri Belaid a decade ago and the suspicion of financial corruption.

Renewed attacks on journalists

On 11.02.23, it was reported that a total of 29 attacks had been carried out on journalists during the period of the second round of the parliamentary elections between 15.01.23 and 30.01.23. The National Union of Tunisian Journalists (Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens) (SNJT) called on the Independent High Authority for Elections (Instance Supérieure Indépendante pour les Élections, ISIE) to launch an investigation into the attacks. It said the attacks were connected with the ISIE's refusal to provide journalists with information about the election.

20 February 2023

Nationwide demonstrations against poor economic conditions and recent arrests

On 18.02.23, according to media reports, several thousand people demonstrated across the country against deteriorating living conditions and the recent arrests of political opponents (cf. BN of 13.02.23). In eight cities, including Sfax, Monastir, Kasserine and Kairouan, the protesters had responded to a call by the trade union federation Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT).

27 February 2023

Negative statement about migrants

In a speech delivered on 21.02.22, President Kais Saied called for "urgent measures" to be taken against the illegal immigration of people from sub-Saharan Africa. He spoke of "hordes of illegal immigrants" who are responsible for violence, crime and unacceptable acts. Demonstrators, human rights organisations and the African Union criticised Saied for his remarks.

Further action against opposition forces

According to media reports on 22.02.23, further opposition members have been arrested and judges dismissed in June 2022 (cf. BN of 13.06.22) have not been reinstated. In addition, it has reportedly still not been made public what the arrested persons are specifically accused of. On 21.02.23, it was reported that the leader of the Islamic-conservative party Ennahdha had been summoned for further questioning. Furthermore, on 20.02.23, the General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), Esther Lynch, was expelled from the country for participating in a protest against the government (cf. BN of 20.02.23). In its subsequent statement, the ETUC said such "authoritarian tactics" had no place in a democratic country.

HRW report on LGBTIQ

Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported on 21.02.23 that, because of their online social media activities, LGBTIQ people have been tracked by security forces, blackmailed online, harassed, exposed and prosecuted based on unlawfully obtained digital photos, chats and similar information.

20 March 2023

Parliament opens without independent journalists

On 13.03.23, the newly elected parliament held its first session. Foreign and independent journalists were not allowed to enter the parliament building on the orders of President Kais Saied, so only state media and news

agencies were allowed in. The official reason given was to prevent possible unrest. However, protests broke out in front of the parliament building. In addition, the opposition voiced renewed criticism of the legitimacy of the election and the arrests of dissidents in recent weeks. The Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (Haute Autorité Indépendante de la Communication Audiovisuelle, HAICA) and the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (Syndicat National de Journalistes Tunisiens, SNJT) protested against media censorship.

24 April 2023

Opposition politician arrested and detained

According to media reports, leading opposition politician Rahed Ghannouchi, who heads the Islamic party Ennahdha, was arrested on 17.04.23 and detained after interrogation. The arrest warrant was issued on charges of incitement to civil war and planning to attack the internal security of the state, following a statement of Ghannouchi that such a civil war would take place if all left-wing and Islamic parties were banned. Several Ennahdha party members had already been arrested earlier in the week. Furthermore, the authorities closed several of the party's offices. Since early February, the Tunisian authorities have detained more than 20 prominent opponents of President Saïed's leadership (cf. BN of 13.02.23 and 20.02.23). Furthermore, the parties were severely restricted by the new constitution of July 2022 (cf. BN of 01.08.22, 19.09.22 and 07.11.22).

15 May 2023

Synagogue attack during pilgrimage

Media report that on 09.05.23, several Jewish people were killed and others injured in an attack on the El Ghriba synagogue in Djerba. The attack took place during an annual pilgrimage that attracts many worshippers from abroad. Police officers were also killed, and the attacker was shot dead. Despite accusations to the contrary, President Kais Saïed insisted that his country remained a safe place for people of the Jewish faith and that the case would be investigated.

22 May 2023

Demonstrations against deteriorating press freedom

On 18.05.23, journalists demonstrated against what they saw as the government's repressive policy of using the judiciary to intimidate and pressure the media and media workers. Two journalists who had reported critically on the attack on the synagogue on the island of Djerba (cf. BN of 15.05.23) were denounced by a police union. The journalists also protested against the five-year prison sentence handed down to a journalist from the private radio station Mosaique FM for revealing information about the security services. A police officer accused in the same case of leaking information to the journalist was sentenced to ten years in prison in an appeal procedure.

The Tunisian journalists' union (Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens, SNJT) has announced further demonstrations.

26 June 2023

Investigation into insulting the president

According to press reports, the journalist and radio presenter Zied El Heni was arrested on 20.06.23 after a judge ordered him to be remanded in custody ahead of his trial on charges of insulting President Kaïs Saïed. He was released two days later, but the case remains under investigation. Freedom of expression in Tunisia has been increasingly restricted since 25.07.21 as part of the restructuring of the state.

Politician remains in custody

According to media reports, Tunisia's anti-terrorism judicial unit initially ordered the release of the politician Chaïma Issa on 23.06.23, before the public prosecutor's office appealed the decision. She belongs to the National Salvation Front (Front de Salut National) and is one of a number of opposition figures who were imprisoned in February 2023 on suspicion of conspiring against state security (cf. BN of 13.02. and 20.02.23).

