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President of the Republic

Kais Saied

Route de la Goulette, Site archéologique de Carthage

Tunisie

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Your Excellency,

**I write to you to express my grave concern over the ongoing arbitrary detention of prominent 74-year-old human rights defender Sihem Bensedrine since her arrest on 1 August**. On 14 January, she announced an open-ended hunger strike to protest her arbitrary detention. Her lawyers shared this message in which she announced her hunger strike on her Facebook page: «I will no longer stand the injustice that strikes me. Justice cannot be based on lies and calamities, but on concrete, tangible evidence». She is detained solely in relation to her work as President of the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD) from 2014 to 2018 which investigated and referred to the prosecution its findings on crimes committed by Tunisian authorities from 1955 to 2013.

Sihem Bensedrine has been under investigation since February 2023 following a complaint by a former IVD board member alleging forgery because revisions had been made to the IVD final report after it was submitted to the then president in December 2018. On 7 March 2023, an investigative judge charged Sihem Bensedrine with «forgery», «fraud» and «abuse of official capacity» and banned her from traveling. On 1 August 2024, the judge ordered Sihem Bensedrine’s pre-trial detention and she was taken into custody on the same day. On 28 January 2025, the investigative judge informed her lawyers that he extended her pre-trial detention for another four months. Sihem Bensedrine’s prosecution appears to be a form of reprisal against the work of the IVD exposing allegations of human rights abuses and corruption committed by past Tunisian authorities.

Since she started her hunger strike, Sihem Bensedrine’s health has rapidly deteriorated. She is experiencing weakness and low oxygen levels, leading to her being placed under respiratory assistance in the prison infirmary. On 26 January, she was transferred to a hospital outside prison because her health deteriorated further. Sihem Bensedrine’s pre-existing health conditions, including high blood pressure and cardiac issues, increase her vulnerability.

**I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Sihem Bensedrine, drop all the charges against her and end the misuse of the criminal justice system to target her. Pending her release, she must be granted adequate access to qualified health professionals providing health care in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent. Ensure she also has access to her family, lawyers and is held in conditions that comply with international standards.**

Yours sincerely,

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**Copie**

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