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ONG oeuvrant pour les droits de l'homme

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TUNISIA

Astronomical Prison Sentences in the Case of the So-Called "Secret Apparatus" A Retaliatory and Arbitrary Punishment Lacking Any Legal or Moral Justification

The Free Voice Organization strongly condemns and expresses its deep concern regarding the verdict issued on June 2, 2026, by the Criminal Chamber Specialized in Terrorism Cases at the Tunis Court of First Instance, sentencing Professor Rached Ghannouchi to life imprisonment plus thirty years, bringing the total sentences against him to one hundred and six years. This is in addition to a number of Ennahda Movement leaders who also received astronomical sentences and life terms, in a dangerous precedent unprecedented in the history of the Tunisian judiciary. It is important to note the following:

First: A ruling that defies all legal and human logic

Issuing such astronomically large sentences against a citizen who is over eighty years old, with the prison terms exceeding his biological age by many times, can only be described as a vindictive punishment that lacks any legal or moral justification, which explicitly contradicts the principle of proportionality between the punishment and the alleged crime, enshrined in Tunisian law and international conventions alike.



Second: A flawed trial in both form and substance

Our organization observed a number of fundamental irregularities in this trial, most notably:

the closure of the session to the media and the families of the accused, in clear violation of the principle of open court proceedings.

The remote trial deprived the accused of the most basic guarantees of a legitimate defense.

The reliance on files already adjudicated by the judiciary with final and binding judgments constitutes a violation of the principle of double jeopardy.

The complaint originated from a rival political party, not the Public Prosecutor's Office, revealing the purely political nature of this case.

The issuance of an arrest warrant in the absence of the accused, without notifying him as required by law.

Third: The Subjugation of the Judiciary and the Elimination of Opposition Through Legal Rulings

This ruling cannot be separated from a systematic context that Tunisia has witnessed for years, based on using the judiciary as a tool to eliminate political opposition and transforming courtrooms into arenas for settling scores with adversaries instead of being bastions of justice.

The prosecution of a figure of such symbolic and political stature on charges from which one of the complainants himself declares the accused innocent, as happened in 2018, is blatant evidence that the trial is a trial of thought, not of action.

Fourth: Blatant violations of international treaties

The Free Voice Organization reminds that Tunisia is a member to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other international agreements that guarantee:

The right to a fair and public trial (Article 14 of the International Covenant)

The prohibition of cruel and inhuman treatment (Article 7)

The protection of freedom of opinion, expression, and political activity (Articles 19 and 25)

The protection of the elderly from disproportionate punishment.

Therefore, we demand the following:

- 1-** We demand that the Tunisian authorities immediately and unconditionally release Professor Rached Ghannouchi and all other political prisoners, and implement the decision issued by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which concluded that his detention lacked any legitimate legal basis.
- 2-** Overturn this ruling and respect the guarantees of a fair trial in accordance with international standards.
- 3-** End the political manipulation of the judiciary and restore its genuine independence;
- 4-** Comply with Tunisia's international obligations arising from its ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other relevant conventions.
- 5-** Call international human rights organizations and bodies for urgent intervention, particularly in light of the Tunisian authorities' blatant disregard for the decision of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

This disregard constitutes a documented violation of international human rights law. Specifically we urge:

- * The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to intervene immediately and issue a statement condemning this serious setback.
- * The UN Special Rapporteurs on the independence of the judiciary, freedom of expression, and arbitrary detention to open an investigation into the documented violations.
- * The European Parliament and the Council of Europe to review the nature of their relations with Tunisia in light of the deteriorating human rights situation.
- * The International Federation for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch for on-the-ground action, media outreach, and pressure on the Tunisian authorities.
- * We urge the African Union and the Arab League not to remain silent regarding this blatant violation targeting a political leader of significant Arab and Islamic symbolic importance, as well as political opponents, who are being subjected to astronomical prison sentences outside the bounds of law and logic.

Our organization emphasizes that international silence at this stage constitutes tacit complicity in injustice, and that mere statements without effective pressure mechanisms are no longer sufficient in the face of an authority that has demonstrated its disregard for international law.



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*** Free Voice - منظمة صوت حر - VOIX LIBRE *** ong-voixlibre.org

Contact : +33 6 30 67 05 90 *** voixlibre2003@yahoo.fr