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TUNISIA

Following a Peaceful March in Support of the Global Sumud Flotilla Activists...

Tunisia: Wave of Arrests, Dozens Detained and Forcibly Disappeared, Including an Entire Family Authorities Employing a "Collective Intimidation Tactic"

The Free Voice Organization strongly condemns the extensive wave of nighttime arrests carried out by the Tunisian security forces following a peaceful march calling for the release of detainees from the Global Sumud Flotilla, who have continued to be detained for six months. To date, the campaign has resulted in the detention of more than 15 people. The organization considers these actions to constitute a form of collective intimidation, targeting not so much specific individuals as the very right to protest, in a dangerous escalation that threatens to close what remains of the space for fundamental freedoms in Tunisia.



Facts Reveal an Intent to Intimidate, Not to Enforce the Law

The manner in which these arrests have been carried out—including nighttime raids on homes, taking people from the streets, detaining an entire family (the father, mother, and their two daughters together), preventing lawyers from accessing detention centers, and a complete official blackout regarding the number of detainees and their fate—cannot be understood as routine security measures. This pattern bears the hallmarks of a “collective intimidation tactic.” Its purpose is not to investigate a specific act, but rather to instill widespread fear among anyone considering taking to the streets in the future. In particular, the detention of two children together with their parents serves no conceivable investigative purpose and has no reasonable explanation other than collective punishment and retaliation against the activist father through his family.

Fifteen arrests in a single night, following a publicly announced and authorized peaceful march in which no acts of violence were recorded, constitute a forceful and intimidating response and cannot be justified by any serious security rationale.

This Is Not an Isolated Incident

“Free Voice” notes that this campaign comes within the context of a recurring pattern of pursuing every voice expressing solidarity with the Global Sumud Flotilla issue, beginning with the arrest of flotilla activists themselves on “money laundering” charges since March 2026. Such charges are increasingly being used in Tunisia to criminalize legitimate solidarity and human rights work rather than pursuing such activities under provisions actually pertaining to freedom of expression and assembly, culminating in the pursuit of anyone who expresses solidarity with them in the streets.

This approach reveals a systematic policy aimed at drying up the sources of protest by punishing those expressing solidarity before the circle of solidarity can expand.

Legal Accountability That Leaves No Room for Interpretation

These practices constitute not merely procedural violations, but fundamental breaches of Tunisia's constitutional and international obligations:

Arresting people merely for participating in a peaceful demonstration directly undermines the essence of the right to peaceful assembly guaranteed under Article 42 of the Constitution and Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, without any exception that could justify such action. Denying detainees access to a lawyer and preventing them from notifying their relatives violates Article 13(3) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, transforming detention from a lawful procedure into outright arbitrary detention.

The failure to disclose the fate and places of detention of those arrested, if it continues, places Tunisia on the threshold of the crime of enforced disappearance, as defined by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Enforced disappearance is a continuing crime that is not subject to a statute of limitations and cannot be justified under any circumstances, including grounds of public security.

The detention of a minor, Tasnim Al-Shabbi, in the context of a nighttime security campaign requires the immediate activation of the special protection afforded under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Tunisia is a State Party without reservations that could justify such treatment.

Accordingly, Free Voice Demands:

- 1-** The immediate and unconditional release of all those arrested in connection with their participation in the march, and the dropping of all proceedings related thereto.
- 2-** The immediate and comprehensive disclosure of the identities of all detainees and their places of detention, and an end to any form of enforced disappearance.
- 3-** Immediate and unrestricted access for lawyers to their clients in all detention centers.
- 4-** The opening of an independent and urgent judicial investigation into the legality and proportionality of this campaign, with accountability for anyone who issued or carried out orders contrary to the Constitution.
- 5-** An immediate end to the policy of criminalizing solidarity with the Palestinian cause and with detainees from the Global Sumud Flotilla, and an end to the use of financial charges as a cover for prosecuting human rights activism.
- 6-** The release of the Global Sumud Flotilla activists who are on hunger strike, given reports indicating a severe deterioration in their health, and their immediate access to specialized medical care. Any harm that befalls them amid this blackout shall be the full responsibility of the Tunisian authorities.

Free Voice holds the Tunisian authorities fully responsible for the physical and psychological safety of all detainees and calls on the National Authority for the Prevention of Torture to conduct an urgent and immediate visit, without prior notice, to all detention centers concerned.

It also calls on the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, the situation of human rights defenders, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, and the rights of the child, to intervene immediately and publicly with the Tunisian authorities before the situation deteriorates further.

Silence or delay in confronting this pattern of collective intimidation will be understood as a green light for its repetition on an even wider scale.