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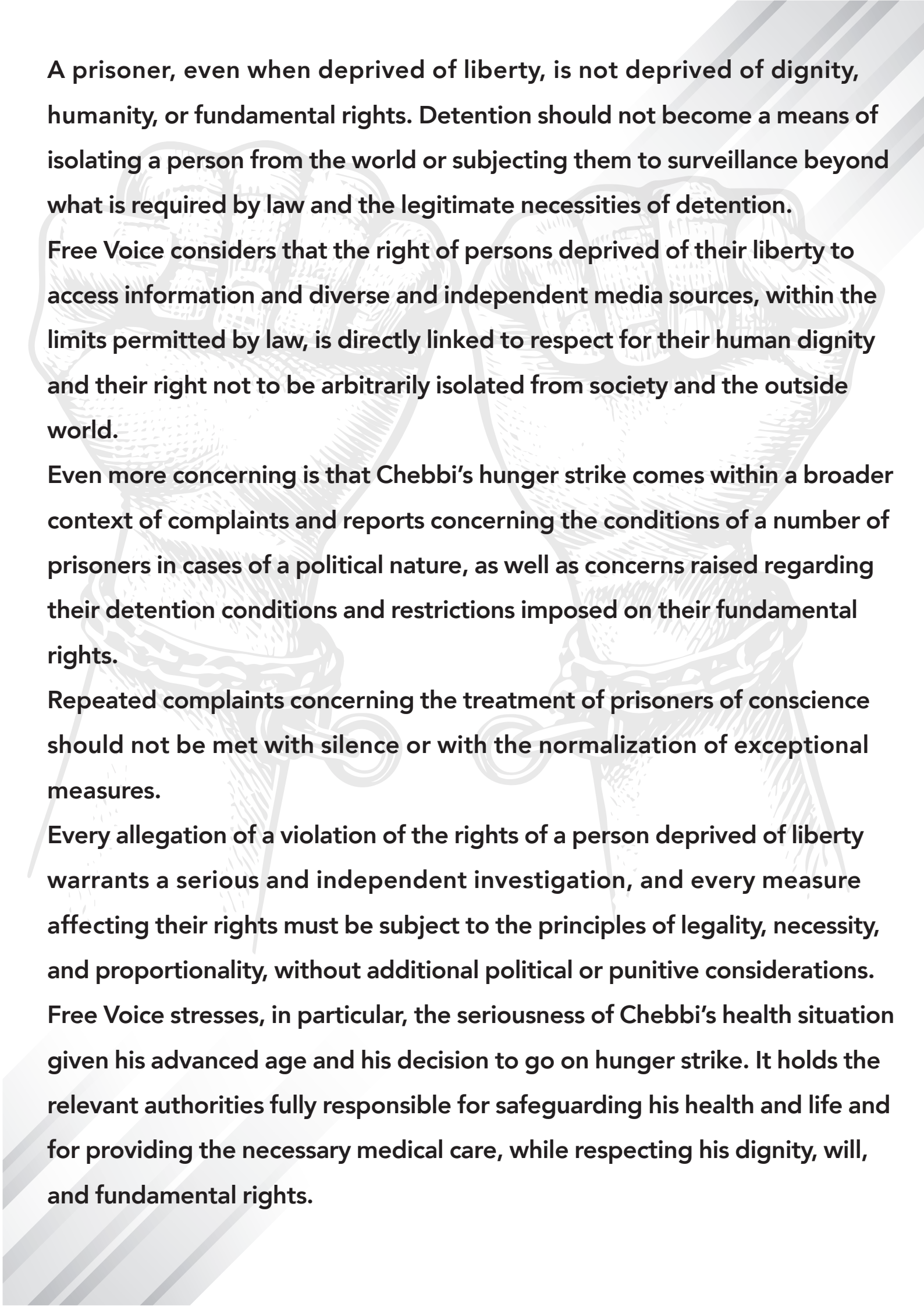
TUNISIA

Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, an Octogenarian Behind Bars, Goes on Hunger Strike in Defense of His Right to In- formation and Dignity

Free Voice expresses its deep concern over the decision by political prisoner Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, aged 81, to begin an open-ended hunger strike from inside prison, in protest against restrictions that his family has reported as being imposed on his right, and that of other prisoners, to access information and media outlets.

The fact that a man of this age has reached the point of going on hunger strike, placing his health and life at risk in order to demand what should be considered among the most basic of rights represents an extremely serious development that must not be treated as a passing incident within a prison institution.





A prisoner, even when deprived of liberty, is not deprived of dignity, humanity, or fundamental rights. Detention should not become a means of isolating a person from the world or subjecting them to surveillance beyond what is required by law and the legitimate necessities of detention.

Free Voice considers that the right of persons deprived of their liberty to access information and diverse and independent media sources, within the limits permitted by law, is directly linked to respect for their human dignity and their right not to be arbitrarily isolated from society and the outside world.

Even more concerning is that Chebbi's hunger strike comes within a broader context of complaints and reports concerning the conditions of a number of prisoners in cases of a political nature, as well as concerns raised regarding their detention conditions and restrictions imposed on their fundamental rights.

Repeated complaints concerning the treatment of prisoners of conscience should not be met with silence or with the normalization of exceptional measures.

Every allegation of a violation of the rights of a person deprived of liberty warrants a serious and independent investigation, and every measure affecting their rights must be subject to the principles of legality, necessity, and proportionality, without additional political or punitive considerations.

Free Voice stresses, in particular, the seriousness of Chebbi's health situation given his advanced age and his decision to go on hunger strike. It holds the relevant authorities fully responsible for safeguarding his health and life and for providing the necessary medical care, while respecting his dignity, will, and fundamental rights.

In light of this, Free Voice calls on the Tunisian authorities to:

- 1-** Immediately and seriously address the reasons behind the hunger strike, rather than merely monitoring its health consequences.
- 2-** Ensure Ahmed Nejib Chebbi's access to independent and appropriate medical care and regularly monitor his health condition.
- 3-** Enable him to exercise his fundamental rights without restrictions that are not legally justified.
- 4-** Review restrictions imposed on prisoners' access to media and information, and ensure that such restrictions are not used as a means of isolation or punishment.
- 5-** Launch a serious and independent investigation into complaints concerning the detention conditions of prisoners of conscience and any practices that may infringe upon their dignity or fundamental rights.
- 6-** Guarantee detainees' right to communicate with their lawyers and families and to benefit from the legal safeguards afforded to them.
- 7-** Initiate an urgent dialogue with Chebbi, his lawyer, and his family concerning his demands, with a view to addressing the causes of the hunger strike and preventing his health from deteriorating to a life-threatening stage.

Free Voice emphasizes that responsibility for the life of a human being under the authority of the state does not end at the prison gates.

The issue at stake today is not merely a dispute over a newspaper or a television channel. It concerns the principle that should govern the treatment of every human being behind bars: does a prisoner remain a human being fully endowed with dignity and rights, or does the punishment of deprivation of liberty become a deprivation of all other rights as well?

Free Voice calls on the authorities to put an end to any practice that may deepen the isolation of detainees or undermine their dignity, and to respect Tunisia's human rights obligations before the hunger strike turns into a tragedy that cannot be undone.

Liberty may be restricted by law, but human dignity should never be imprisoned.