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### **Tunisia: Arbitrary detention of human rights defender Saif Ayedi**

On 19 October 2022, a group of plainclothes police officers in a civilian car arrested human rights defender **Saif Ayedi** while he was on his way to work with two colleagues, after attending a press conference in the premises of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT).

[Saif Ayedi](#) is a Tunisian human rights defender, member of Bardo section of The Tunisian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LTDH), as well as the Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality (DAMJ).

The human rights defender is also a member of the national campaign “Learn to Swim” that aims to put an end to impunity and police violence in Tunisia. He was part of the coordination group who organised a press conference event in collaboration with the defence team on behalf of the family of Omar Laabidi. Laabidi was a 19 year old football fan who died on 31 March 2018 while fleeing a violent police attack, which led him to throw himself into a river. His body was found the next day, with apparent marks of violence.

Following the press conference, Saif Ayedi travelled to his workplace with two colleagues by taxi. A car of plain clothes police officers stopped the taxi, forced him to get out, and without identifying themselves, took him to an unknown destination. After following the police car his colleagues identifies that the human rights defender was taken to the National Guard station in Cité Ettadhamoun.

Saif Ayedi’s lawyers were told that a decision to arrest him was taken following consultation with the Public Prosecutor’s Office, in the context of an arrest campaign targeting the ongoing popular protests in Cité Ettadhamoun and other areas of the capital. These protests by residents of these neighbourhoods, particularly young people, are denouncing the police violence that caused the death of a young man in Ettadhamoun City, Melek Selimi. As an active member of the group who conduct visits to detention centres and prisons led by LTDH, and Learn to Swim, Saif Ayedi was the first to visit the family of the deceased and to speak to the eyewitness and close friend of the victim Fourat Ayari.

On 20 October 2022, the human rights defender appeared before the Public Prosecutor in Ariana, who handed the to the investigating judge in the same district. The latter considered that the interrogation should be resumed at the level of the national guard station in Cité Ettadhamoun, because of the lack of elements necessary for the investigation.

Following this interrogation, Saif Ayedi will have to appear tomorrow, 21 October 2022, before the investigating judge, who will have to determine the case: the human rights defender will spend one more night in the detention centre.

Front Line Defenders is concerned about the prosecution of Saif Ayedi, as it is one of a number of other cases of harassment by the Tunisian authorities against human rights defenders, particularly those working against police violence and impunity. Front Line Defenders calls on the Tunisian authorities to drop all charges against him, as it believes that these acts are merely attempts to deter the peaceful actions of human rights defenders. It believes that human rights defenders should be able to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tunisia to:**

1. Immediately drop any charges against Saif Ayedi as it is believes that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful action in defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the false accusations of the human rights defender with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Tunisia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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