



Committee to Protect Journalists

His Excellency President of the Republic Kais Saied
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Site archéologique de Carthage
Tunis, Tunisia
Email: contact@carthage.tn

Dear President Saied,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), an independent, non-governmental organization that advocates for press freedom worldwide, to express our deep concern over the erosion of press freedom in Tunisia and, in particular, the rapidly deteriorating health of arbitrarily detained Tunisian journalist Mohamed Boughalleb.

Mr. Boughalleb, 55, was [arrested](#) on March 22, 2024, following a complaint of defamation from a Ministry of Religious Affairs employee over his radio and social media commentary concerning the ministry's policies and visits abroad. He was [convicted](#) on April 18, 2024 under Article 128 of Tunisia's penal code, and Article 86 of [the telecommunications code](#), and sentenced to six months in prison. Mr. Boughalleb has now been in prison for nearly a year, as not only was his sentence [increased](#) to eight months when he appealed, but he was also charged on a second defamation count on [April 5](#) under [Decree 54](#), the country's restrictive cybercrime law, over a separate complaint from a state university professor regarding a social media post.

CPJ is deeply concerned by reports of the deteriorating health of Mr. Boughalleb in Mornaguia prison, who suffered from diabetes before his imprisonment. After being held for nearly a year in poor conditions, his health has worsened significantly, now experiencing skin rashes, prostate issues, ear pain due to malnutrition and humidity, high blood pressure, deteriorating vision requiring urgent treatment, and other health complications. Yet, he has been denied regular access to necessary medication and adequate treatment. His recent [transfer](#) to a more overcrowded section of the prison has only exacerbated these risks, posing a serious threat to his life. No journalist should face imprisonment for doing their job—let alone at the cost of their life.

The charges against Mr. Boughalleb and his continued imprisonment also reflect a troubling pattern of growing judicial harassment aimed at silencing independent journalism in Tunisia. [At least five journalists](#)—[Sonia Dahmani](#), [Mourad Zghidi](#), [Borhen Bsaies](#), and [Chadha Hadj Mbarek](#)—are currently

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Committee to Protect Journalists

behind bars. This is the highest number CPJ has recorded in the country since 1992. Like Mr. Boughalleb, three of these journalists were charged under Decree 54, which has been used to stifle criticism, and suppress investigative reporting, directly opposing the principles of a free press required by the Tunisian constitution. The continued classification of defamation as a crime, rather than a civil harm, not only violates international freedom of expression standards but also severely undermines the ability of journalists to report freely and openly.

I urge you to take immediate action to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Boughalleb before his health worsens further. We also call on your administration to release the four other journalists currently imprisoned, repeal Decree 54, decriminalize defamation, restore the independence of media regulators, and end the judicial harassment of journalists to allow them to work without fear of reprisal. Restoring the protections for journalists that once defined Tunisia's media landscape would send a clear message that the country remains committed to upholding fundamental freedoms.

We appreciate your consideration of this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'J.M. Ginsberg'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jodie Ginsberg, CEO, Committee to Protect Journalists