

Seventh Annual Report on the Safety of Journalists

Executive Summary

The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists

Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center

From October 15, 2022 until October 15, 2023, The Monitoring Unit at the Occupational Safety Center of the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists recorded 210 assaults affecting 237 victims, including 92 females and 145 males of which 193 journalists, 40 photojournalists, 2 male commentators and 2 institutions' headmasters. The attacks were distributed to 178 in the real space, including 122 attacks in the field of operation, 29 attacks in the workplace, 18 correspondences, 6 cases in the Assembly of the deputies, 3 cases through the media, in addition to 32 attacks recorded in the digital space. Also, geographically speaking, the attacks were distributed as follows : 115 attacks in the governorate of Tunis , 14 attacks in Gafsa, 11 attacks in Medenine, 9 attacks in Kairouan, 8 attacks in each of Mahdia and Sfax, 7 attacks in Sidi Bouzid, 5 attacks in each of Beja, Sousse and Nabeul, 4 attacks in each of Monastir and Jendouba, and, last, 3 attacks in Kasserine. Moreover, two attacks were recorded in the governorates of Ariana, Tataouine, Gabes, and Kebili, and one attack in each of the following areas : Ben Arous, Tozeur, Bizerte, Siliana, Manouba, and the State of Libya.

The assaults were divided up into 55 cases of prevention from work, 33 cases of harassment, and 32 cases of incitement and withholding of information in 30 cases. The Monitoring Unit also recorded 26 cases of judicial tracking as stipulated in the penal code on 10 occasions and Decree 54 on 7 occasions and the cases are distributed as follows :

- Penal Code : 10 cases
- Decree 54 : 7 cases
- Anti-Terrorism Law : 5 cases
- Personal Data Protection Law : 2 cases
- Communications Journal : one case
- Emergency Law : one case

Tracking cases have remained at the stage of :

- Primary Research : 14
- Investigation : 4
- Imprisonment : 2
- Trial : 1

Six judgments were also issued, including 2 prison sentences, 2 financial penalties and 2 cases of acquittal.

Furthermore, the Monitoring Unit recorded 11 cases of verbal assault, 6 cases of physical assault, 5 cases of threats, 3 cases of arbitrary detention, 7 cases of prior monitoring, one case of sexual harassment and one other case of forced deportation.

The official parties were responsible for 141 attacks that are distributed as follows :

Public Authority Representative	Number of assaults carried out
Polling station heads	41

Security	28
Public servants	15
Members of subsidiary bodies	11
Judicial authorities	9
Ministries	10
Government officials	6
Local officials	5
Deputies	4
Presidency of the Republic	3
Election body	3
Those in charge of information and communication	3
Poll Clerks	1
Audiovisual Communication Authority	1
Army	1

Informal parties were also distributed as follows :

Informal parties	Number of assaults
Social media activists	19
Citizens	10
Management of media organizations	10
Politicians	7
Media professionals	5
Organizing Committees	4
Supporters of political parties	3
Artists	2
Anonymous	2
Businessmen	1
Athletes	1
Owners of private companies	1
Armed groups	1
Lawyers	1
Sports teams' officials and fans	1
Employees of a private company	1

Additionally, 92 of the female journalists were subjected to 106 attacks, including 58 attacks in which they were alone. In addition to 10 attacks, on the basis of gender, divided into 6 cases of incitement, one case of verbal abuse, one case of sexual harassment, one case of harassment and one case of prevention from work, for which social media activists were responsible in 6 cases, the departments of media institutions, on two occasions, and unknown athletes on one occasion each.

The percentage of assaults requiring judicial prosecution in 2023 reached 26%, as the Unit recorded 55 attacks out of 210 that require judicial prosecution.

Journalists filed 20 complaints related to 15 serious attacks out of 55, which represents 27.3%, creating an increase of 3.3 points compared to the previous year. Moreover, complaints were submitted on 16 occasions to the public prosecutors and 4 cases to security centers. 14 complaints

are still in the complaint stage and 5 in the preliminary research stage, while only one verdict was issued regarding the recorded attacks during 2023.

Recommendations

Following the attacks on journalists monitored by the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists through the Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center during the period covered by the report, and after the shift in the general trends of indicators towards a crisis in access to information, threats to freedom of expression, the return of censorship of journalistic work and the increase in the risk as a result of incitement speeches, the Syndicate directs a number of recommendations to various stakeholders in order to improve the journalistic work environment, make it safer, prevent and reduce attacks on journalists and ensure the fight against impunity.

Presidency of the Republic :

- Reviewing its communication policy and adopting periodic press meetings as a mechanism in order to ensure that journalists have access to reliable and accurate information related to public affairs.
- Respecting the independence of media institutions and cutting with speeches of incitement, threats and betrayal directed at the media.
- Withdrawal of Decree 54 on combating crimes related to information and communication systems and the adoption of a participatory approach in the drafting of all legislation related to freedom of the press and freedom of expression.
- Intervene to put an end to the crisis of the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication and immediately appoint its head.
- Adequate diplomatic effort within the framework of pushing forward the file of journalist Sufian Al-Shurabi and photojournalist Nadir Al-Qattari in order to reveal the truth about their disappearance.

Assembly of the Deputies :

- Cancel the decision of the Bureau of the Council related to the approval of the confidentiality of the work of the parliamentary committees and the application of the rules of the internal regulations of the Assembly of the Deputies.
- Providing suitable working conditions for journalists within the Council by enabling them to move freely in the Council's spaces and ensuring their right to communicate directly with the deputies.
- To expedite the consideration of bills related to freedom of expression and freedom of the press and to hold hearings of the structures concerned to present their proposals for their development.

Government of Tunisia :

- Cancelling work with internal leaflets that disrupt the free flow of information within public administrations and ministries, specifically Circular No. 19 of 2021 on the controls of government communication.

- Activating the role of media and communication officers within public administrations to ensure good coordination with journalists and the media in dialogues, reporting and investigations in addition to providing real-time information.
- Focusing a permanent and independent national mechanism to monitor attacks on freedom of the press and freedom of expression in order to ensure redress and justice.
- Cutting with the prosecution of journalists by state officials outside the framework of the law regulating the journalistic profession Decree 115 and pushing in the direction of enjoying the right of reply and activating amendment mechanisms and bodies instead of resorting to the judiciary.
- Publicly condemn assaults against journalists and develop a national plan to protect them.

Amendment Bodies :

- Publish procedural manuals for the complaint mechanisms of the Press Council and the Independent High Authority of Audiovisual Communication and the stages of considering complaints, the deadlines and conditions associated with them and circulate them to the public opinion.

The Judiciary System :

1. Public Prosecutors :

- Stopping the referral of journalists outside the framework of the law regulating the journalistic profession, Decree 115 of 2011.
- Adopting the principle of freedom as a rule and suspension, retention or imprisonment as an exception, considering that the journalist does not represent a danger to his social environment and that his profession serves the public interest.

2. The investigating judges :

- Stopping the issuance of publication bans and resorting to the Audiovisual Communication Authority as it has the full mandate to regulate audiovisual communication and cutting with prior censorship of media contents.
- Further push in the direction of uncovering the truth in the case of the enforced disappearance of Sufian Al-Shurabi and Nadir Al-Qattari in Libya.

3. Seated Judiciary :

- Achieving the principle of redress for victim journalists to ensure the non-repetition of crimes committed against them through impartial, prompt and effective investigations in cases of attacks against journalists and the issuance of judicial trials against the aggressors within a reasonable period.

Ministry of the Interior :

- Carrying out prompt and effective administrative investigations in cases where its agents were involved in assaulting journalists and ensuring that they are held accountable.
- Strengthening the work of the crisis cell within it to intervene for the benefit of journalists and enhance field coordination with the Syndicate during peaceful demonstrations and gatherings.
- Circulating a circular to its agents about stopping the demand for licenses not stipulated in Tunisian legislation related to photography in public places for the benefit of journalists working in national institutions.

Politicians :

- Cutting off speeches of incitement against journalists and not using journalists as a political card to mobilize public support.
- Urging their supporters to stay away from the discourse of incitement to violence and hatred and not to involve journalists in conflicts that have nothing to do with them.