

December 2023 Report

National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists - Monitoring Unit of the Occupational Safety Center

Part One: Attacks on Journalists and Photojournalists during the First Round of Local Elections

The first round of local elections witnessed a continued escalation in the frequency of attacks compared to the previous legislative elections in their first round. The Monitoring Unit recorded, during the period from December 2nd to December 27th, 2023, a total of 28 aggressions on journalists and photojournalists.

The aggressions were as follows, one attack beyond the voting day and 27 attacks during the voting day for the first round of local elections.

The attacks during the first round of local elections on December 24th, 2023, affected 22 victims, comprising 11 men and 11 women, all of whom are officially accredited journalists and photojournalists by the Independent High Authority for Elections to cover the electoral process.

The victims of the attacks work in 12 media institutions, which are 9 radio stations, a website, a news agency and a written newspaper.

The attacks targeted journalists and photojournalists during their coverage of the first round of local elections in 11 governorates.

The attacks were geographically divided into 8 attacks in the governorate of Medenine and 6 attacks in the governorate of Kairouan.

Four attacks also affected journalists and photojournalists in the governorate of Tunis. Two attacks were also recorded in each of the governorates of Gabes, Bizerte, and Monastir. While a single attack affected journalists and photojournalists in each of the governorates of Nabeul, Beja, Ben Arous, and Kef.

Most of the attacks were associated with the right to access information. In this regard, the Monitoring Unit recorded 18 cases of work ban and 8 cases of withholding information, in addition to recording instances of harassment on 2 occasions.

Most of the attacks were related to the heads of polling stations where they were responsible for 17 attacks. The heads of polling stations were also involved in 8 attacks against journalists and photojournalists.

Employees of the Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE) were responsible for 2 aggressions, while security officers were responsible for a single attack.

Part Two: Attacks on Journalists and Photojournalists Outside the Election Pathway

The Monitoring Unit recorded, during the month of December 2023, 11 attacks on journalists and photojournalists outside the local elections' pathway. The attacks affected 15 victims, comprising 3 women and 12 men. The victim journalists work in 8 media organizations including 3 radio channels and 5 TV channels.

Journalists were subjected to legal prosecution on 4 occasions and physical assaults on two occasions during the month of December 2023. The Unit also recorded one case of libel, one case of work ban, one case of prior monitoring, one case of harassment and one case of verbal aggression.

Those responsible for the recorded attacks included judicial authorities on three occasions, security officers and administrations of media institutions each in two cases, athletes, communication officials, citizens, and politicians each in a single case.

The attacks happened in different spaces, 10 cases in real space and one case in virtual space.

The attacks were geographically distributed into 7 cases in the governorate of Tunis, and a single case in each of the governorates of Tozeur, Monastir, Sousse, and Kairouan.

Recommendations

After detailing the attacks on journalists during the first round of the local elections and during the month of December 2023, The National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists recommends:

The Independent High Authority for Elections (ISIE):

- To consider cases where heads of polling stations and chiefs of polling offices were the cause of hindering the work of journalists and photojournalists, to administratively follow up and investigate these cases, and to provide the Syndicate with their outcomes and the actions taken in regard to them.
- To reinforce the right to access information within its internal circulars and ensure its widest dissemination during the next round of local elections and the upcoming presidential elections.
- To develop the training curriculum for the Commission's staff in line with the guarantees of the right to access information stipulated in national legal standards and international standards to ensure support for the transparency of the electoral process and ensure voters' right to access information.
- To develop a joint action plan with the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists based on the lessons learned during the first round of local elections.

The Syndicate also calls on:

Presidency of the Republic:

- To reconsider its decision to suspend the payment of the Independent High Authority for Audiovisual Communication members' salaries and to revitalize the authority anew, considering it a national asset for the adjustment in the media sector, protecting journalism from entering into organizational chaos.

Tunisian Ministry of Interior to:

- Revitalize the role of the crisis cell within it, following a decline in its responsiveness to rapidly intervene for the benefit of journalists facing violence or harassment. Implement all necessary measures to ensure the effectiveness of its operations.

General Inspectorate of the Ministry of Justice to:

- To conduct a serious and prompt investigation against the Public Prosecutors who have been reported for procedural deviations in pursuing journalists and to verify the extent to which they adhere to the procedures for filing lawsuits, especially in the case of journalist Ziad Al-Hani