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Webinar: Deteriorating Human Rights in Tunisia

On Tuesday, April 04, 2023, Arab Organisation for Human Rights in the UK (AOHR UK) held a [webinar](#) on the human rights situation in Tunisia, the increase in arbitrary arrest of dissidents, and attempts to eliminate the independence of the authorities.

Researcher Roba Salibi moderated the webinar attended by the American academic and diplomat Nabil Al-Khoury, French lawyer Elie Hatem, former Tunisian Minister of Women's Affairs Sihem Badi, Italian politician Ibramo Emiliano, political analyst and French sociology professor Vincent Geisser. The son of the detained judge, Bashir Al-Akrami, and the daughter of Prominent political opponent, the detainee Sayed Ferjani.

Nabil Al-Khoury began his speech by referring to KaisSaeed's failure to make any political or economic achievements throughout his four-year term in office, during which the living standard of citizen has deteriorated severely, and the inflation rates also were sky rocketing.

On the political level, Al-Khoury indicated that KaisSaid's foreign policies were catastrophic for Tunisia, as he suddenly sent an ambassador to Damascus to normalise relations with the Assad regime, which was supported by the Saudi and Emirati regimes. However he went on and did it although it would cause disputes with the Biden administration but Said "He risked US relations for Gulf money."

Al-Khoury stressed that the violence of the authority with the opponents will only lead to chaos and will impede any reforms or progress in the country at various levels.



Al-Khoury stressed the need to involve civil society in creating ideas to save the country from the current political and economic crises adding, that "Tunisians think for the best of their country and they have the solutions that would save it."

The former Minister Sihem Badi began her speech by calling on the various European governments to reconsider their relationship with the KaisSaid regime, as their cooperation makes them partners in the deteriorating human rights situation in Tunisia.

Badi added that the Tunisian authorities must stop all forms of repression against opposition and civil action in Tunisia, and immediately release journalists, lawyers, activists, and all prisoners of conscience who were imprisoned for rejecting the regime's policies and decisions. She also demanded the end of all military trials for civilians.

Badi criticised Saeed's systematic interference in the work of the judiciary, its decisions and undermining its will, stressing that the democratic institution must be restored, and an equal national dialogue must take place to overcome this crisis.

Badi stressed Saeed's actions are unacceptable at all levels, especially his hate speech, which affected even migrant workers, stressing that Tunisia should return to the 2014 constitution and start a national dialogue based on freedom of opinion and diversity.

Minister Sihem Badi concluded her speech by calling for a real balance between the executive, legislative authorities in Tunisia, instead of being all under his control, noting that the situation in Tunisia has become increasingly unstable due to the inflation and the high cost of living.

Italian politician Abramo Emiliano said at the beginning of his speech that, according to various international analysis and reports, "Tunisia is no longer a democracy. He imprisoned political opponents and journalists, fought independent media platforms, and imprisoned those working on them, such as Nouredine Bitar of Mosaique Radio."

Emiliano shed light on the migrant crisis that has recently emerged in Tunisia after the racist speech of President Kais Saeed, pointing out that the migrant crisis is international and present even in Italy. He stressed that the sea has become the migrants' graveyard due to the arbitrary policies of governments with them, in



reference to the recorded videos of the brutality of Tunisian security in dealing with these migrants at sea.

French expert, political analyst and sociology professor Vincent Geisser expressed his sadness over the deteriorating human rights situation in Tunisia, pointing out that the country is witnessing an "era of unprecedented repression throughout Tunisian history."

Geisser stressed that the era of Kais Saeed is worse, darker, and more tyrannical than the era of Ben Ali, who was also dictatorial, but at least he was allowing some civil currents to appear on the scene, unlike Kais Saeed, who fights everyone: Islamists, liberals, the left, and feminists, in addition to the isolating Tunisia from the Arab, African and European world.

Geisser indicated that the difference between the Kais Saeed and Ben Ali regime is that Saeed's regime has an "authoritarian identity" supported by the ideology of "Tunisia above all." "He promotes the idea that foreign interference is the cause of the deterioration of conditions in Tunisia, and therefore everything that is not Tunisian must be confronted and faith in his ideology that will save the country."

Geisser indicated that the "conspiracy theory" adopted by KaisSaeed explains the aggressive approach he has towards human rights NGOs, women's organisations, and other movements and groups, which he accused of being linked to foreign armed groups and working as spies for foreign parties, and that it also explains the aggressiveness of his speech towards foreigners and immigrants who come to live in Tunisia, pointing out that the recent brutality with African immigrants is a vivid example of this approach."

Geisser added that KaisSaeed "believes that parliamentary democracy is not made for Tunisia," and "he simply wants all powers to be in his hands... In the new constitution that Saeed wrote, parliament and MPs have no power."

He added, "KaisSaeed is a president who wants to rule alone and control all the institutions of the country... a president who suffers from what is called "unilateral authoritarianism."

Jacir concluded his speech by saying, "The international community must pay attention to what is happening in Tunisia, which is witnessing an unprecedented



situation of tyranny and repression that has placed it in a diplomatic, economic, political and social crisis."

French lawyer Elie Hatem stressed that repression and violence against opponents is a general feature of authorities around the world and not only in Tunisia or Arab countries, pointing out that the best solution to stop such practices is "first to educate people, secondly to combat corruption."

Hatem stressed that in order for "spreading peace and rebuilding our Arab world," experiences of other countries, whether in Europe or in Asia, such as China must be studied. He concluded his speech by saying that "the ancient Arab civilisation was one of the best civilisations throughout history with regard to politics, and the West is still learning from them until now."

In his speech, Mohamed Aziz Al-Akrami, son of Judge Bashir Al-Akrami, said that fighting corruption and refusing to violate the law were the main reasons why the Tunisian authorities targeted his father and deprived him of his freedom.

"My father's only weapon in the face of violations and rampant corruption was his adherence to the law, but the authorities did not allow him to do so, so he is currently in detention in very poor conditions," Aziz said.

Aziz recounted the details of his father's arrest, and said, "A group of security personnel in civilian and official clothes, numbering about 50, stormed our house and searched everything, including phones and computers... They insulted my father and took him illegally to the detention centre without disclosing the reasons for the arrest." Aziz stated that his father was subjected to a media defamation campaign by the state to undermine his reputation due to his role in combatting corruption.

Kawthar Al-Ferjani, the daughter of political dissident Sayed Ferjani, spoke about her father's deteriorating health condition inside his prison due to the poor conditions that prompted him to go on hunger strike.

Ferjani added, "After my father's health condition deteriorated and he was transferred to the hospital, he had to break the strike, but the conditions of detention have not improved yet... He is subjected to grave moral violations... In prison, they refuse to tell him the times of prayer, iftar, and fasting."



Ferjani pointed out that the family filed a complaint in the United Kingdom in order to impose sanctions on Kais Saeed, Tunisian Minister of Interior Tawfiq Charafeddine, Minister of Justice Leila Jaffal, Minister of Defense Imad Mamish, and former Acting Minister of Interior Reda Gharsallah, for committing serious crimes against her father and against human rights in the country.

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