

POLICE BRUTALITY IN TUNISIA

ACHRS STATEMENT | FLORIAN LHABITANT



Recent protests against the Tunisian President were severely repressed by Tunisian law enforcement. Dozens of protestors were arrested and journalists were attacked by police. ACHRS condemns the violence used against protestors and journalists, as well as the use of police brutality as a deterrent to freedom of expression and the right to speak.

Hundreds of Tunisians protested Friday, January 14th against President Kai's Saïed. The police used truncheons, tear gas, and water cannons to disperse the protesters. Many were arrested.

A French journalist was arrested and beaten up by the police while covering the protest. Although he told the policemen, in Arabic and French, that he was a journalist, he kept being brutalized. He was hit by policemen in uniforms and his camera was taken away. According to the Tunisian National Union of Journalists, more than 20 other journalists were attacked by the police. The violence observed last Friday is said to be the most brutal since the 2011 Revolution.

The people protested against what they consider as a coup, the suspension of the parliament last July by President Saïed. The protest also happened 11 years after the fall of former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, on 14th January 2011.

Freedom of the press and freedom of speech are probably the most precious achievements of the 2011 Revolution in Tunisia and they should be protected at all costs. According to Reporters Without Borders, Tunisia ranked 1st among MENA countries in the Press Freedom Index. Tunisia signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in which article 19 stipulates "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice."

Tunisia has violated its international commitments by using force against protestors but also against journalists. ACHRS condemns the acts of the police who used their powers disproportionately. ACHRS also calls on the Tunisian authorities to investigate the violence committed during the protests and to take measures to avoid police brutality in the future and to ensure freedom of the press by letting journalists do their job.

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