



CAIRO INSTITUTE
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS STUDIES
Institut du Caire pour les études des droits de l'homme
مركز القاهرة لدراسات حقوق الإنسان

UN Human Rights Council: 21st session
Oral Intervention: Item 6-Tunisia UPR
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
19 September 2012
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The Tunisian government must uphold its commitments to protect freedom of opinion and expression

I never imagined that I would appear before this honorable Council after Tunisia ousted its despotic and corrupt ruler and liberated itself from fear, and after its people freely elected a constituent assembly and new leadership, and after the government of Tunisia pledged to respect freedom of opinion and expression before this very Council last May.

However, after nine months of increasing attempts to control the public media establishment, and as journalists and their colleagues are attacked while the perpetrators go unpunished;

And when one of those accused in the attacks is a former security agent who was involved in corruption and the removal of the legitimate leadership of the Journalists Syndicate under Ben Ali, and when this individual - after having been appointed by the government as the director of the Dar al-Sabah newspaper institution, which was formerly owned by one of Ben Ali's in-laws - attempted to kill a journalist only last week by running him over with his car;

And when media professionals continue to be referred to trial before a judiciary that is not yet fully independent, simply for performing their jobs, or are threatened with litigation, just as I myself was threatened last Saturday by an advisor of the prime minister for having criticized his role in impeding media reform;

And when civilians continue to be referred to exceptional courts to hold them accountable for their opinions, as in the case of a former advisor of the president which is currently pending before a military court;

And when media workers, artists, and political activists are threatened not only by the state authorities, but also by groups in which extremists participate alongside common criminals;

It is then that I believe it to be my duty to stand before this Council to warn of the grave risks of failing to immediately adopt international standards for freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and judicial independence, according to recommendations made by this Council, and of failing to apply the legal statutes which guarantee the freedom and independence of the press, which were issued last year in the Tunisian Official Gazette.