

16 May 2017

### **Tunisia: Human rights lawyer Najet Laabidi sentenced to six months imprisonment**

On 11 May 2017, the 8th Misdemeanour Chamber of the Tunis Court of First Instance found human rights lawyer, **Najet Laabidi**, guilty of “attributing to a public official (...) illegal acts related to his job without proof” and sentenced her to six months imprisonment under Article 128 of the Tunisian Penal Code. The verdict came after over one hundred lawyers pleaded in favour of Najet Laabidi on 10 May 2017. She intends to appeal the Court’s decision.

[Najet Laabidi](#) is a human rights lawyer and former member of the executive bureau of Tunisian human rights group, *Liberté Equité*. She is the legal representative of victims of reported torture in what is known as the “Barraket Essahel” case. The Barraket Essahel case goes back to 1991, when authorities said they had uncovered a plan orchestrated by officers to topple President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and establish an Islamist regime. Between May and July 1991, 244 army officers were arrested, many of whom were reportedly tortured by state security agents in the Tunis headquarters of the Interior Ministry.

On 11 May 2017, the 8th Misdemeanour Chamber of the Tunis Court of First Instance sentenced Najet Laabidi to six months imprisonment for “attributing to a public official (...) illegal acts related to his job without proof” under the article 128 of the Tunisian Penal Code. On 12 October 2016, Najet Laabidi had been sentenced in absentia to a year in prison on the basis of article 128 of the Penal Code. The charge had been filed by Judge Leila Hammami, the president of the military court of first instance of Tunis. According to Leila Hammami, Najet Laabidi made declarations that defamed her without proof. Najet Laabidi was only informed of this conviction on 24 April 2017. While she immediately opposed the initial verdict, she was unsuccessful in her appeal which was heard on 10 May 2017.

A first complaint against Najet Laabidi had been filed after she pleaded on 26 November 2015 in an appeal case concerning former director of National security, Ezzedine Jenaiyeh, who was convicted in absentia in the Barraket Essahel case. She was accused by Judge Leila Hammami of violating articles 125 and 126 of the Penal Code (related to insults to a judicial officer) after she pointed out some procedural irregularities in the trial. Judge Leila Hammami then filed another complaint on 21 December 2015 after Najet Laabidi accused the military court of being partial in the Barraket Essahel Case. The Attorney General of the Appeal Court of Tunis then charged Najet Laabidi on the basis of article 128 of the Penal Code.

Front Line Defenders condemns the sentencing of human rights lawyer, Najet Laabidi, to six months imprisonment, as it believes it to be in retaliation to her legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights in Tunisia, particularly the provision of legal representation to victims of torture.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tunisia to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally quash the sentence against **Najet Laabidi**, as it is believed that it is solely motivated by her legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Tunisia are able to carry out their



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legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.