

## **UHUB INTERNATIONAL JURISTS UNION**

### **PRESS STATEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL JURISTS UNION REGARDING RACHED GHANNOUCHI 13 MAY 2026 – ISTANBUL**

“A homeland cannot be built through oppression, nor can stability be achieved through tyranny. A homeland can only be established on consultation, justice, and respect for the will of the people.”

This statement belongs to Rached Ghannouchi and serves as a concise reflection of his vision and philosophy regarding society and statehood.

Rached Ghannouchi, a founding member of the International Jurists Union, is a person who has devoted his 85-year life to serving his nation in accordance with this philosophy, striving to ensure that every individual enjoys rights, a life worthy of human dignity, and the establishment of a free and prosperous society.

Ghannouchi was detained on 17 April 2023 by the Tunisian regime under the presidency of Kais Saied on charges of “conspiring against state security” and “inciting civil war” due to remarks he made during a meeting. Following the trial, he was sentenced to twenty years in prison.

The most tragic and painful aspect of this situation is that a man who is now 85 years old has been accused and convicted for precisely the kind of conflict and division that he spent his life resisting. Despite his age, he remains imprisoned.

With the transition to a multi-party political system in Tunisia, Ghannouchi founded the Islamic Tendency Movement in the early 1980s, followed by the Ennahda Movement (Renaissance) movement. However, due to the strong public support these movements received and the increasing electoral momentum behind them, the parties were banned, and Ghannouchi was forced into exile. His years in exile, which began in 1989, continued until the period of the Arab Spring.

Upon returning to Tunisia during the Arab Spring, Ghannouchi demonstrated a remarkable example of political reconciliation and ensured that Tunisia’s transition to the new political climate occurred with significantly greater peace and stability compared to other countries affected by the Arab Spring.

In the first general elections held on 23 October 2011 after the Arab Spring, Ennahda won 37% of the vote and secured 89 seats in parliament, becoming the leading political party. International political experts widely acknowledge that Tunisia’s relatively successful navigation of the Arab Spring, without descending into civil war as in other examples, was largely due to Ghannouchi’s conciliatory approach, which prioritized compromise over escalating socio-political tensions.

Indeed, as the leader of Ennahda, which emerged as the leading party and constitutionally assumed the task of forming the government, Ghannouchi formed a tripartite coalition government with two center-left parties—the Republican Congress Party and the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties. This coalition was a direct product of his politics of reconciliation.

Following the death of Beji Caid Essebsi in July 2019, Tunisia held its second democratic presidential election on 15 September 2019, with the second round taking place on 13 October 2019. Constitutional law professor Kais Saied was elected President.

After assuming office on 13 October 2019, Kais Saied announced on 25 July 2021 that, citing threats to state security and invoking Article 80 of the Constitution, he was freezing all parliamentary powers, suspending parliamentary immunity, dismissing the government, and assuming executive authority through a prime minister appointed by himself.

Following this announcement, Ghannouchi, as leader of Ennahda, which held the parliamentary majority, described Saied's actions as a "constitutional coup" and called upon the public to engage in a "peaceful struggle to protect democracy."

Kais Saied did not stop there. In 2022, he introduced a new constitution, which was approved by referendum. Under this constitution, legislative and judicial powers were effectively concentrated within the executive branch. From that point onward, developments in Tunisia increasingly signaled a return to authoritarianism; opposition politicians, judges, and journalists were arrested. The person most severely affected by this process was Ghannouchi, who had guided the highly delicate Arab Spring process with peace and restraint.

Since 17 April 2023, 85-year-old Rached Ghannouchi, despite all his contributions to Tunisia, has been held in prison under harsh conditions for more than three years and subjected to ill-treatment by President Kais Saied, who now effectively controls both the judiciary and the executive. The apparent reason is the fear that Ghannouchi could remain a potential or imagined political rival.

Despite this injustice, the so-called democratic world, the free world, and the self-proclaimed defenders of democracy in both East and West continue to remain silent.

The Tunisian state must immediately release Rached Ghannouchi and free itself from this disgrace.

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