

A portrait of Sonia Dahmani, a woman with short dark hair and large hoop earrings, resting her chin on her hand. The background is a gradient of blue and teal.

2025 CCBE Human Rights Award

Tunisian lawyer Sonia Dahmani awarded the 2025 CCBE Human Rights Award for defending human rights and freedom of expression

The CCBE decided to grant the CCBE Human Rights Award 2025 to Tunisian lawyer Sonia Dahmani. This award recognises her courage, determination, and unwavering commitment to defending human rights, freedom of expression, and the independence of the legal profession in Tunisia. The CCBE President, Thierry Wickers, will present the award during the CCBE Plenary Session on Thursday 27 November 2025, in Paris. In conferring this award, the CCBE wishes to underline that Sonia Dahmani represents, today, the voice of many Tunisian lawyers persecuted for upholding the rule of law. Her steadfastness in detention illustrates the vital importance of international solidarity and visibility for lawyers who continue to speak out despite intimidation and judicial harassment.

The purpose of the CCBE Human Rights Award:

The CCBE Human Rights Award aims to highlight the work of one or more lawyers or lawyers' organisations that have demonstrated outstanding commitment and sacrifice in protecting fundamental values of the legal profession. The award is granted to those who have brought honour to the legal profession by upholding the highest standards of professional and personal conduct in the field of human rights.

The CCBE President, **Thierry Wickers**, declared today:

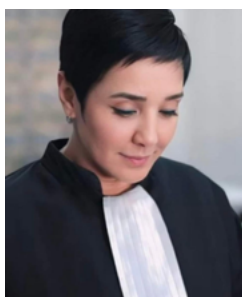
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“The CCBE honours Sonia Dahmani for her extraordinary integrity and courage in the face of increasing repression in Tunisia. Her unwavering dedication to justice and the rule of law embodies the core values of the legal profession: independence, moral strength, and an unyielding defence of human dignity.”

About the award winner: **Sonia Dahmani**



Profile and professional background

Sonia Dahmani has been a practising lawyer before the Court of Cassation in Tunis for over twenty-five years. Renowned for her eloquence, integrity, and humanity, she is also a respected media commentator on legal and social issues, and has consistently advocated for democracy, women's rights and equality.

Throughout her career, she has been recognised for her tireless defence of human rights defenders, political prisoners, and victims of discrimination. Her public engagement stems not from political affiliation but from a profound sense of civic duty and her conviction that the legal profession carries a moral obligation to speak when justice is at risk.

Arrest and prosecution

On 11 May 2024, Sonia Dahmani was violently arrested by masked officers inside the Tunis Bar Association, in full view of her colleagues. The arrest, based on Decree-Law No. 2022/54 — a repressive law frequently used to criminalise dissent — followed public comments in which she denounced increasing state repression, prison overcrowding, and racism against sub-Saharan migrants.

Since her arrest, she has faced at least five criminal proceedings, all related to statements made in the legitimate exercise of her freedom of expression. Several of these proceedings have resulted in prison sentences ranging from eight months to two years, reflecting the systematic misuse of this decree to silence independent voices.

Detention and ill-treatment

Reports from international human rights organisations describe her detention in Manouba Prison as inhuman and degrading, in violation of Tunisia's obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture.

She is being held in a twenty-square-metre cell with four inmates convicted of common crimes, in conditions infested with rats and insects, lacking ventilation, hygiene, and privacy. She has been denied access to showers for weeks, including during extreme summer heat.

She has endured humiliating searches and sexual assault by prison agents. On one occasion, she was forced to wear a sefseri (a garment typically imposed on individuals accused of moral offences) before being arbitrarily prevented from attending her own hearing.

Sonia is subjected to continuous psychological and physical pressure, denied medical treatment and essential medicines for diabetes and cardiovascular problems, and deprived of basic personal items. Food is often spoiled or withheld, which has contributed to a serious deterioration in her health.

In March 2025, she began a hunger strike to protest against these conditions after being deprived of family visits and communication rights. Despite modest improvements following international advocacy, the authorities continue to use deprivation and humiliation as punishment.

Nevertheless, Sonia Dahmani remains steadfast in her belief in justice and freedom, inspiring lawyers and human rights defenders worldwide.

Context and broader implications

Her persecution forms part of a broader campaign of intimidation against Tunisian lawyers and judges. Since the dissolution of the High Council of the Judiciary in 2022, dozens of legal professionals have faced arbitrary detention, prosecution, or disciplinary measures, undermining judicial independence and the rule of law.

Sonia Dahmani's case has become emblematic of the erosion of freedom of expression and the independence of the legal profession in Tunisia.