

Report
Observation Mission
Trial of lawyer Sonia DAHMANI
December 26, 2025 - Tunis

1. Introduction

In recent months, due to the numerous trials against Sonia Dahmani, several observation missions have been held.

This report is therefore supplemented by previous reports (<https://protect-lawyers.org/it/report/>) ; in particular the one concerning the observation mission of the hearing of November 11, 2025, relating to the same case (<https://protect-lawyers.org/it/missione-di-osservazione-processuale-uditio-di-sonia-dahmani-tunisia/>).

2. Context

Sonia Dahmani is a Tunisian lawyer and « columnist ».



Detained in Manouba women's prison since 11 May 2024¹ in very harsh conditions, under high security and under strict surveillance, **she was finally released on 27 November 2025.**

The release, in the form of conditional release ordered by the Tunisian Minister of Justice, came unexpectedly and essentially coincided with the awarding, by the CCBE, of the "Human Rights Award" to Sonia and with the appeal hearing (28.11.2025) relating to another two-year prison sentence (see the related report: <https://protect-lawyers.org/it/missione-di-osservazione-giudiziaria-processo-di-sonia-dahmani/>).

Sonia is subject to at least five criminal proceedings relating to the practice of her profession and the exercise of the right to criticism and expression.

More specifically, **three proceedings** concern critical statements:

- from May 2024 on television regarding Tunisia's migration policies;
- from 2021 on the radio regarding widespread racist behavior in Tunisia;
- also from 2021, also regarding widespread racist behavior in Tunisia, but made on television.

For these proceedings, Sonia has already been sentenced:

- to one year of imprisonment in the first instance (July 6, 2024), later reduced to eight months of imprisonment on appeal (September 10, 2024);
- to two years of imprisonment in the first instance (October 24, 2024), later reduced to eighteen months of imprisonment on appeal (January 24, 2025);
- to two years of imprisonment in the first instance (June 30, 2025)²; the appeal was set, without notice, for early November and adjourned to November 21, 2025, then adjourned again to November 28, 2025³, and finally to January 26, 2026.

¹ Sonia Dahmani was arrested at the Tunisian Bar Association, where she had sought refuge. On May 7th, during a television broadcast, she had criticized the humiliating treatment of sub-Saharan migrants and Tunisia's migration policies. An arrest warrant was issued for her on May 10th.

² For this hearing, OIAd conducted an observation mission. The report can be found at: <https://protect-lawyers.org/it/mission-dobservation-judiciaire-audience-de-sonia-dahmani-tunisie/> .-

³ OIAD also conducted an observation mission for this hearing. The report can be found at: <https://protect-lawyers.org/it/missione-di-osservazione-giudiziaria-processo-di-sonia-dahmani/> .-

The **remaining two proceedings** concern critical statements (in particular made in 2023 during a television broadcast) on prison conditions in Tunisia.

3. The trial of December 26, 2025.

The trial for December 26, 2025, was scheduled at the Criminal Chamber of the Court of First Instance of Tunis.

This trial concerns one of two proceedings related to statements made by Sonia Dahmani about prison conditions in Tunisia.

The investigation was initiated pursuant to Legislative Decree No. 54 of 2022. The charge is dissemination of false information.

The alleged offense is covered by Article 24, a highly problematic and particularly contested provision that has been used repeatedly against Sonia and other individuals prosecuted for crimes of opinion.

Furthermore, the Court of Cassation was asked for a preliminary ruling on the correctness of the charge and the legitimacy of applying Legislative Decree 54 of 2022. And the trial, at the hearing on December 26, 2025, was quickly adjourned because, once again, this ruling from the Court of Cassation was missing from the case file.

This circumstance seemed highly anomalous, because also the previous hearing, on November 11, 2025, had already been adjourned for the same reason.

4. The hearing.

The hearing, as mentioned, was scheduled at the Criminal Chamber of the Court of First Instance of Tunis for approximately 9:00 a.m.

The delegation of international observers (composed of Richard Sedillot of the Ruen Bar and Alessandro Magoni of the Brescia Bar, both delegated by OIAD, and Justine Devred of the Senlis Bar) went to the courthouse where they met with Sonia Dahmani and her lawyers.

The entrance to the courthouse was quick, even though the observers were not accompanied by any Tunisian colleagues. There was also no problem identifying and entering the courtroom.

The courtroom was large enough, with plenty of people, but not too crowded.

Sonia, finally free, was also present in the courtroom.

The hearing proceeded very quickly. The judge, in fact, announced the need to postpone the hearing due to the absence, once again, of a preliminary ruling from the Court of Cassation regarding the validity of the charge. The public prosecutor did not attend, and the defense agreed.

The judge reserved the right to announce the new trial date at the end of the morning.

That evening, the postponement of the trial to **February 6, 2026**, was announced.

5. Initial observations on the hearing.

As in November, in this case too, the judge's decision to postpone the hearing appeared to be planned, and the lack of the Court of Cassation's ruling in the judge's file was once again an "excuse."

Therefore, any concerns related to the date chosen for the hearing (December 26, 2025, perhaps to have fewer international observers) were fortunately allayed.

Moreover, the new element that occurred between the previous hearing of 11.11.2025 and that of 26.12.2025 was Sonia's release on 27.11.2025.

6. Meeting with Sonia Dahmani during the mission.

The observers met with Sonia Dahmani and some of her family and friends.



The very emotional meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss: the general situation in Tunisia; the various trials against our colleague; the trials of other lawyers, magistrates, journalists, and opponents⁴; her conditions of detention; and the situation in Tunisian prisons in general.

We then tried to understand the meaning of Sonia's release, in a context that is difficult to decipher and uncertain⁵.

Sonia has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the presence of international observers and how much she was helped, especially when she was in prison, by knowing that many colleagues in Europe were close to her and her case.

7. Conclusions.

As Sonia Dahmani and her Tunisian colleagues stated, the presence of international observers was important and must continue at the next hearings on January 26, 2026, and February 6, 2026.

In addition to intensifying the presence of observation missions, it is necessary, however, to increasingly raise awareness among lawyers and the European public of the conditions in Tunisia, Tunisian lawyers, and human rights defenders.

Finally, as in previous reports, it is important to remember that one of the most sensitive issues remains the migration policies of Tunisia and European countries. These migration policies, of course, are intertwined and influence one another.

⁴ See the list of these trials contained in the report of the previous hearing of November 11, 2025 (link: <https://protect-lawyers.org/it/missione-di-osservazione-processuale-udito-di-sonia-dahmani-tunisia/>). OIAD, moreover, is also downgrading other trials in Tunisia, with hearings also scheduled for the end of December 2025.

⁵ In the autumn, there were protest demonstrations in the country (in the south of the country) with a general climate of tension and expectation.