

## Press release

Hamburg, 8 August 2024

### **Former guest of the Foundation arrested: Sihem Ben Sedrine, Tunisia, former Chairwoman of the "Commission for Truth and Dignity"**

The Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People supports people worldwide who courageously raise their voices against injustice and offers politically persecuted people protection and peace for a certain period of time in Hamburg. One of them is the Tunisian journalist and human rights activist Sihem Ben Sedrine, who was accepted as a guest of the Foundation in 2002. After the fall of dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali 2011, she chaired the Commission for Truth and Dignity to investigate human rights violations from 1995 onwards. She submitted her final report in 2020.

Now, on August 1, 2024, Sihem Ben Sedrine (73) was arrested for allegedly falsifying the report of the now dissolved "Truth and Dignity Commission" (IVD). She has been charged to have misrepresented parts of the final report published in 2020, accepting a bribe to insert a passage accusing the Franco-Tunisian Bank (BFT) of corruption. Back in March 2023, a court banned her from leaving Tunisia while the public prosecutor's office investigated the alleged forgeries.

We, together with the "Ibn Rushd Fund for Freedom of Thought", whose Award she received in 2011, are concerned about Sihem Ben Sedrine and ask the German government, to actively campaign for her release.

We join the "Lawyers Without Borders" ("Avocats sans Frontières"), the Civil Coalition for Transitional Justice and other civil society's organizations, which expressed their deep concern in their Communiqué "The Executive's Security and Justicial Arms undermine Truth and Dignity in Tunisia" on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024 (Excerpt - full text, see attachment):

"...their condemnation and denunciation of the judicial harassment , including travel bans and judicial pursuits culminating in the issuance of an arrest warrant on August 1<sup>st</sup>, faced by the President of the Truth and Dignity Commission, Ms Sihem Ben Sedrine for her work with IVD commission."

(...)

"their rejection of the judiciary subjugation and manipulation according to electoral agendas to eliminate opposition and silence critics, harassing human rights defenders, former commission heads, and actors of civil society, political opponents, and trade unionists, rather than maintaining an independent judiciary that effectively pursues perpetrators and human rights violators."

Under the dictator Ben Ali, Sihem Ben Sedrine was already active for years in Tunisia for the "League for Human Rights" denouncing serious human rights violations by the regime. She received death threats, survived several attempts on her life, was charged with false accusations, arrested several times, persecuted and monitored. For years, the regime subjected her to smear campaigns and slander.

This was the reason why the Hamburg Foundation for Politically Persecuted People invited her to Hamburg for a time-out in 2002. Subsequent grants were awarded to her by PEN Germany, Darmstadt, the international PEN and the city of Graz, "Writer / Artist in Exile", to further protect her.

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