

Minister of Interior Hichem Fourati  
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Dear Minister Hichem Fourati,

On 4 September 2019, Tunisian police arbitrarily arrested Maissa al-Oueslati and her 16-year-old brother in Jbal El Jloud in the outskirts of the capital Tunis. Maissa al-Oueslati had received news about a neighbour threatening to set himself on fire in front of a police station in protest about his social condition. She rushed out of the house with her younger brother, to try to calm the protester down until his family arrives.

More than five police officers started beating up the unarmed protester. Maissa al-Oueslati screamed, asking the police to let him go while trying to film the scene with her phone. A police officer snatched her phone and twisted her arm. Her younger brother rushed towards her and begged the officer to let her go. The police officer pushed the teenage boy on the ground and proceeded to handcuff Maissa al-Oueslati and her brother. In the police station in Jbal El Jloud, police officers interrogated the two siblings without the presence of a lawyer or a parent, as required by Tunisian law for minors. When their father showed up at the police station, police officers handed him a report that he refused to sign. It incorrectly states that he confirms that his children do not need a lawyer. Later that night, Maissa al-Oueslati and her brother were transferred to Bouchoucha detention centre in another part of Tunis where they spent the night. The next morning, she and her brother were transferred in a police car to the investigative judge office who charged her with three offences; "insulting a public official while performing their duty, excessive violence against a public officer, and refusing to comply with orders". With these three charges, Maissa al-Oueslati faces up to four years in prison and risks not finishing school. Her trial is set to take place on 19 September 2019. Her brother is facing the charge of "slandering a public officer and refusing to comply with orders." His trial is scheduled on 23 October 2019 and, if convicted, he risks a prison sentence.

I therefore ask you to ensure that all charges against Maissa al-Oueslati and her younger brother are dropped. I call on you to investigate the arbitrary detention of Maissa al-Oueslati and her brother and the denial of their right to a lawyer during questioning. Finally, I call on you to end the impunity of security forces and investigate their use of penal code provisions to punish peaceful protest and actions.

Yours sincerely,