

Tunisia detains 2 students over satirical song criticising police

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Tunisian police arrested two students over a satirical song criticising the police, their lawyer said on Wednesday, reinforcing fears of an erosion of freedom of speech after President Kais Saied seized most powers two years ago.



Source: unsplash.com

Youssef Chelbi and Dhia Nsir had posted a clip on Tik Tok and Facebook this week showing them laughing and singing a sarcastic song criticising the police's treatment of detainees and a drugs law.

Lawyer Imen Souissi said they are facing charges of insulting others through social networks and they could face up to a year in prison if the court finds them guilty. Police and the interior ministry were not immediately available for comment.

The arrest of the two men drew concern from activists and bloggers, who republished the song to show solidarity with them. Activists said that freedoms have become besieged and that Tunisia has become a large prison.

Freedom of speech and media was a key gain for Tunisians after the 2011 revolution that ended the rule of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and triggered the Arab Spring protests.



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Saied, who shut down parliament in 2021, and seized all powers, pledged to protect rights and freedoms and said he would not be a dictator.

But his opponents, who described his moves as a coup, said that he had established one-man rule, imprisoned his opponents and suppressed critical voices.

On Tuesday, an appeals court sentenced a radio journalist to five years in prison for disclosing information about the security services.

The main journalists union criticised the ruling and said that it is the most severe sentence against a journalist in Tunisia's history and did not happen even during the most dictatorial periods in Tunisia. The verdict was a message to silence journalists, it said.

This year, police have arrested several prominent opposition leaders on charges of plotting against state security, a move the opposition described as consolidating a dictatorial regime.

Saeid rejected the criticism, saying that they are criminals and terrorists. A judge on Monday sentenced opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi to a year in prison on charges of incitement.

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