

Al Ghannoushi: Latest Releases No Sign of Tunisian Rights Improvement



Rashed Al Ghannoushi, the head of the Tunisian Al Nahda Islamic movement confirmed that the latest releases carried out on Thursday, July, 26th, 2007, add nothing new to the Tunisian political status quo and that they don't refer to any respect to human rights or political reform in Tunisia.

Al Ghannoushi pointed out that the release wording can be called a conditional release. That is, any decision from the Minister of Interior return this prisoner back to prison to complete his previous sentence. More over, any released prisoner is subjected to 5 year administrative probation after leaving prison .

" It is true that 23 leaders of Al-Nahda Renaissance Movement have been released. Other leaders and members were released during the past 15 years. They are a part of about 30000 members who were detained in the early 1990s, after facing a military tribunal. They received varied sentences. Therefore, sentences of some of them end and they are released from time to time. Only some dozens of Al Nahda leaders are still in prison", said Al Ghannoushi.

" However, the latest releases are only security measures, not as part of a political plan for openness to Al-Nahda Movement or any other opposition movement. They are only a kind of a few vents under pressures from humanitarian organizations and liberal powers inside and outside the country.

Al Ghannoushi pointed out that the release wording can be called a conditional release. That is, any decision from the Minister of Interior return this prisoner back to prison to complete his previous sentence. More over, any released prisoner is subjected to 5 year administrative probation after leaving prison. The released prisoner had to show up at police stations every now and then. He is also prevented from moving from one place to another without a security permit. He is banned from having a passport, denied state jobs. These released prisoners are denied many rights given to ordinary citizens."

Al Ghannoushi adds "Therefore, we see such measures as only moving from a narrow prison to a wider prison. These releases don't address our demands and those of the Tunisian opposition. We demand more overhaul in all fields, especially in politics. We demand a comprehensive political reform that lifts restrictions on freedom of speech and freedom of establishing societies and parties, and help the country move from a police system to an open democratic system."

"This release does not reflect a breakthrough in the human rights situation. They only reflect a little submission to many pressures from various parties."

It is worth mentioning that Tunisian opposition lawyer, Mohamed Abou, was released after he was sentenced to two and a half years for writing articles comparing Tunisian prisons with those of Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. He wrote many other opposing articles. He was released last Tuesday after French President Sarkozy hinted at him during his latest visit to France.

Al Ghannoushi said that Mohamed Abou was jailed because of his exercising freedom of speech and he drew a comparison between prisons. He drew a comparison between the character of Sharon when he was invited to visit Tunisia to attend the international media conference, with that of Bin Ali.

Mohamed Abou and his family faced frightening threats. Domestic and foreign organizations were founded to defend him, may be because he is a well-known lawyer. These organizations exercised many pressures, the latest of which was Sarkozy's during his visit to Tunis as he raised the issue of detaining Mohamed Abou.

Thus, the Tunisian regime was obliged to free him. The measures that took place during the last fifteen years weren't a part of a political reform project. They are denied many rights. These means we are still miles away from serious political overhaul in the country.

Al Ghannoushi said: "There is still the target for which the Tunisian opposition is struggling, definitely through peaceful pressures: freeing the country from the fetters of the police-controlled regime, and free the political life from terrorism exercised by the police against people to realize a democracy based on citizenship, human rights and the democratic practice of the political life."