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Oral Submission by International PEN, the International Publishers Association (IPA), and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN)

In April 2007, the IFEX Tunisia Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of 18 organisations concerned for the promotion of freedom of expression in Tunisia, issued a report, entitled *Freedom of Expression in Tunisia: The Siege Holds* which refers to serious breaches of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in Tunisia, notably Article 19, following the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS), hosted in Tunis in November 2005. These breaches include:

- Internet and book censorship;
- Restrictions on freedom of association;
- Interference in the judiciary;
- Detention of prisoners of opinion;
- Reports of torture and police brutality.

The TMG welcomes the release of one of the persons referred to in the TMG report¹, although another journalist, Slim Boukhdir, was arrested in November 2007 and is now serving a one-year prison sentence in difficult conditions in Sfax prison. Also we welcome news of the release of some of the censored books² and some positive announced changes in legislation³, but these do not go far enough to address the concerns raised in this report. In addition, we will be looking at the implementation of such announced measures. To date, there is no evidence allowing us to say and welcome that there has been an ease on Internet blocking, harassment of human rights activists, or restrictions on independent journalism for instance. Once again, we urge the Tunisian authorities to encourage diversity of content and ownership of the press, to stop blocking news websites, to release ALL censored books and to allow new titles to come out.

We believe that the only recommendation pertaining to freedom of expression, included in the Tunisia UPR report⁴ (revision of Art. 51 of the Press Code) is far from sufficient to address the multitude of problems existing in Tunisia in this field.

The TMG also reiterates its recommendation that the Tunisian government must allow legal NGOs to work, and must allow independent organisations to be established without requiring prior political approval. In April 2008, the Kalima newspaper was again denied registration at the Ministry of the Interior, thus preventing it from operating as a legal entity.

In conclusion, while we appreciate the work of the UPR in reviewing the adherence of Tunisia to international human rights mechanisms, we very much hope that the UN will continue its scrutiny and ensure that obligations are met until such time as the questions raised surrounding Tunisia's commitments are resolved.

For more, please visit: www.internationalpublishers.org, www.internationalpen.org.uk & www.wan-press.org

¹ Journalist and lawyer Mohamed Abbou in July 2007, although he remains under restriction.

² Most of them have been edited and published by the Arab Institute for Human Rights and the Temimi Foundation

³ E.g.: The removal of the legal submission procedure with regards to periodicals

⁴ A/HRC/WG.6/1/TUN/4

