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Tunisia: Case against woman human rights defender Arroi Baraket still ongoing

The case of **Arroi Baraket** is due to be held on Wednesday 18 January 2023. After more than a year, and following a series of postponed hearings, the last of which took place on 28 December 2022, the Court of First Instance of Tunis will hear the case. Arroi Baraket faces aggravated charges of assault and "extreme violence against a public official".

[Arroi Baraket](#) is a woman human rights defender and journalist advocating for gender equality and social justice in Tunisia. She serves as the Communications Officer [Minority Rights Group \(MRG\)](#) in Tunisia. She has been active in documenting on the work of social movements since 2011, notably reporting on anti-government protests which lasted from December 2020 to September 2021 .

On 21 October 2022, woman human rights defender and journalist Arroi Baraket's appearance before the judge of First instance of the Tunis court was postponed to 28 October 2022. The judge granted the request made by the woman human rights defender's defence team, who asked for a postponement in order to analyse a new report presented by the police officer's lawyer. After several postponements, it is expected that the lawyers of the woman human rights defender will finally be able to present their case on 18 January 2023. Arroi Baraket faces aggravated charges of assault and "extreme violence against a public official".

On 17 September 2021, Arroi Baraket was returning home in a car with two friends when they were stopped by a police patrol car. This took place a few minutes after the start of curfew, a measure which was imposed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. After being issued with a fine, Arroi Baraket saw that there were other cars in the street that were not being stopped by the police. As she began to film the street, her car door was flung open and an officer reportedly threw himself on her while repeatedly punching her and trying to take her phone. Even though Arroi Baraket assured the officer that she was only filming the street and not the police, the officer continued to attack her until he got her phone. During the incident, the woman human rights defender stressed that she was a journalist and had a right to film in public spaces. This comment caused her to be insulted by the police officer with sexist slurs.

She asked for her phone back so that she could contact her lawyer, as she intended to file a complaint against the officer. However, the officer replied that she would only have access to her phone at the police station and continued to insult her with misogynistic remarks and to threaten her by bragging about his membership of the police union, assuring that this would absolve him of responsibility if she tried to take action against him. In the presence of other officers, the police officer continued to provoke her by filming her while she insisted on her right to take her phone back and to contact her lawyer. Eventually, one of her friends was able to contact a lawyer. Later that night, when Arroi went to the police station to file a complaint against the officer, she learned

that he had in fact already filed a complaint against her for "contempt of a public official in the performance of his duties".

On 21 September 2021, Arroi Baraket testified before the general prosecutor at the Tribunal of First Instance in Bab Bnet, Tunis. The chief prosecutor deemed that there were procedural irregularities, and to ensure an impartial investigation, the prosecutor requested that procedures concerning Arroi Baraket's case were recommenced in an impartial venue, the national guard in Bardo. On 28 September 2021, Arroi Baraket was asked to present herself once again before the general prosecutor at the Tribunal of First Instance in Tunis. On the 30 September 2021, her hearing was scheduled for 22 October 2021.

On 22 September 2021, Arroi Baraket filed her own complaint to the public prosecutor against the police officer who assaulted her on 17 September 2022. More than a year later, the prosecutor dropped her complaint.

Additionally, the Tunisian Association of Democrats Women, a feminist Tunisian association, tried to file a complaint based on the *law* n°2017-58 relative to the elimination of violence against women: the complaint has not yet been processed.

Front Line Defenders believes that the charges brought against Arroi Baraket are directly related to the fact that she is woman human rights defender and a journalist. It is concerned that the charges against Arroi Baraket form part of a wider pattern of harassment suffered by women human rights defenders based on their gender. The case of Arroi Baraket is not an isolated incident. Rather, it is embedded in a policy of impunity and culture of harassment and intimidation by police authorities in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Tunisia to:

1. Immediately drop all charges against Arroi Baraket;
2. Carry out an immediate and impartial investigation of the police officer who attacked her in retaliation for her legitimate and peaceful human rights work;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Tunisia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.