



International Fair Trial Day

2025 Ebru Timtik Award Goes to Ahmed Souab



Ahmed Souab, born in 1957 in one of Tunis's working-class neighbourhoods, rose from modest beginnings to become one of Tunisia's most respected jurists and legal minds. His early activism was shaped by the repression of the Bourguiba era and the ideological tensions of Tunisian campuses in the 1970s. After earning degrees in public law in Tunis and Paris, he returned home and began a public service career marked by principle rather than privilege, resigning from a ministerial cabinet post in 1991 rather than join Ben Ali's ruling party. He then became a judge at Tunisia's Administrative Court, where his bold, precedent-setting rulings challenged authoritarian overreach and earned him recognition across the political spectrum.

Throughout his judicial career, Souab consistently defended those targeted by the regime, including civil servants dismissed for their political affiliations and victims of institutional injustice. His fairness extended even to ideological adversaries from his youth, and his rulings remain widely studied in Tunisia today. After the 2011 revolution, he became a vital force in civil society, working with leading rights organisations and trade unions, co-founding the Union of Administrative Judges, and advising on critical judicial reforms. Despite his



International Fair Trial Day

contributions, he was repeatedly sidelined by political actors, yet he never wavered from his mission to uphold democratic and legal principles.

Following his retirement, Souab became a lawyer and a vocal critic of Tunisia's democratic backsliding under President Kais Saied. He defended dozens of political detainees and dismissed judges, used his media platform to expose due process violations, and remained a fearless advocate for justice. In April 2025, he was arrested and charged under anti-terrorism laws for his outspoken defence of judicial independence. His imprisonment sparked widespread outrage, reflecting the deep respect he commands across Tunisian society. In his final media appearance before his arrest, he affirmed: "I will defend the rule of law until I die"—a statement now echoed by those resisting authoritarianism in Tunisia.

Excerpts from the decision of the 2025 Ebru Timtik Award Selection Committee

"As members of the jury listed below, we are honored to have been entrusted with the responsibility of selecting the recipient of the 2025 Ebru Timtik Award. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Steering Committee for this opportunity.

We consider our participation in this process a profound responsibility—an opportunity to honor the legacy of Ebru Timtik, whose courage, resistance, and unwavering pursuit of justice continue to inspire human rights defenders across the globe. Through this award, we hope to contribute to preserving her memory and advancing the values she lived and died for."

The Jury Process:

"The jury convened twice in 2025. Each juror emphasized the difficulty of the decision, noting the remarkable courage and principled stance of the four nominees, all of whom embodied the spirit of the award and were highly deserving of recognition. Nonetheless, after careful deliberation, each juror identified one or two standout candidates and explained the reasoning behind their selections.

Through these discussions, one of the nominees' name emerged as a consensus choice. Following the presentations and deliberations, the jury reached a unanimous decision."

"Ahmed Souab worked as a judge for years, and rendered bold, independent rulings that have left an enduring mark on the country's legal history. His jurisprudence helped position the administrative court as a rare institution of integrity during the long years of dictatorship. Unlike many other judges, Ahmed Souab stood with the people during the 2011 Revolution and welcomed the democratic transition, becoming a critical ally to Tunisia's vibrant civil society. Later, as a lawyer Souab took on emblematic cases in defense of the marginalized and persecuted. He represented, pro bono, the families of the revolution's martyrs and wounded, long denied compensation and recognition. He was among the first to defend political prisoners following President Saied's 2021 coup, and later represented the majority of the 60 judges arbitrarily dismissed by presidential decree in June 2022—an act he publicly denounced as a grave blow to judicial independence and a turning point that enabled the regime's systematic use of the judiciary to suppress dissent.

Ahmed Souab has been one of the most vocal lawyers denouncing the instrumentalization of the judiciary and the denial of fair trial guarantees in politically motivated cases—most



International Fair Trial Day

notably in the so-called “conspiracy” case targeting Tunisia’s political opposition, a fabricated prosecution marked by systematic due process violations. Mr. Souab publicly challenged the lack of judicial independence, particularly criticizing the presiding judge’s subservience to executive pressure. As a result, he now finds himself behind bars, facing severe terrorism-related charges and grave personal risks. Beyond his legal work, Mr. Souab is a widely respected legal expert and media figure in Tunisia. Through his regular appearances, he has consistently and courageously defended the independence of the judiciary, the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms—values for which he is now being persecuted.”

“As we stated at the outset, selecting one laureate from among these four individuals—each of whom has devoted their life to resisting injustice, defending human rights, and upholding the right to a fair trial, often at great personal cost—was an immensely difficult task.

However, the jury agreed that the ongoing “conspiracy” case in Tunisia—aimed at silencing civil society and dismantling judicial independence—deserves urgent international attention. In this context, we find it critical to recognize **Ahmed Souab**, a man whose entire career has been devoted to the fight for justice and the protection of human rights.

From his time as a judge, where he issued landmark rulings in defense of legality under dictatorship, to his current work as a lawyer defending political prisoners and dismissed judges, Souab has never compromised his values. Despite enduring relentless political persecution, threats, and now imprisonment, he continues to speak out with integrity and courage.

We unanimously award the 2025 Ebru Timtik Prize to Ahmed Souab—not only to honor a lifetime devoted to the rule of law and fair trials, but also because his current situation requires urgent international solidarity and visibility.”

Conclusion

“Ahmed Souab has been detained since April 21, 2025, on alleged terrorism-related charges after publicly denouncing the collapse of judicial independence under President Kais Saied’s regime. In awarding him the Ebru Timtik Prize, the jury also wishes to extend this tribute to all other nominees and, more broadly, to **all lawyers, judges, and human rights defenders** around the world who face imprisonment, judicial harassment, professional retaliation, or other forms of persecution for their commitment to defending fundamental rights and freedoms.

We dedicate this award to all those who, like Ebru Timtik, continue to resist injustice in the pursuit of truth, dignity, and justice.

**With respect and solidarity,
The 2025 Ebru Timtik Award Jury”**

Neri Javier Colmenares - Lawyer, Presidential Adviser on Human Rights (2023–2025), Council Member, Human Rights Institute, Integrated Bar of the Philippines, Vice-President, Confederation of Lawyers in Asia Pacific (COLAP), Philippines Member, International Bar Association (IBA)

Dr. Gülşah Kurt - Academic in Criminal Law and Human Rights Defender, Turkey

Giuseppe Acconcia - Academic in Political Science, University of Padova, Italy



International Fair Trial Day

Fida Hammami - Research and Advocacy Advisor, Amnesty International, Tunisia

Mahienour El Massry - Human Rights Lawyer, Egypt