



[American Congressional Delegation Travels to Tunisia to Urge a Return to the Democratic Path and a Swift End to the Country's State of Emergency](#)

This past weekend, a congressional delegation led by U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) – a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – met with Tunisian President Kais Saied and other officials. The talks were aimed at creating a dialogue to help correct Tunisia's democratic path and emphasizing the importance of an inclusive political process moving forward. Recently, President Saied had suspended parliament and sacked his cabinet in a widely criticized maneuver which provoked global concern regarding a potential regression back towards autocracy in the country. Many observers viewed the action as an illegitimate and unconstitutional attempt by Saied to consolidate power and lay blame at the feet of the parliament during a time when the incumbent government was facing pressure for the economic downturn in Tunisia. As such, pro-democracy advocates voiced uneasiness over the move and reiterated the need to respect and uphold the civic process. In their meetings with Tunisian officials, the American congressional delegation encouraged them to continue to work on building a more inclusive democratic environment, while also paving the way for a peaceful path to ending the state of emergency and political crisis.

President Saied remains a relatively popular politician within Tunisia, eliciting support from those who pin the country's socio-economic struggles on other governmental actors such as the parliament. On the streets of Tunisia, some find Saied's strongman demeanor to be reassuring as he expresses his desire to weed out corruption and incompetence. Placing blame solely on the shoulders of the Tunisian parliament for the economy shrinking 8% last year and unemployment continuing to rise to an estimated 17%, there is a notion among his defenders that Saied's recent move was necessary in order to take control of the situation. Additionally, there are those who fear that the U.S. congressional visit is an interference in Tunisia's internal political crisis. The Tunisian General Labour Union boycotted the talks and asked the United States to not become involved. However, the United States, the Tunisian parliament, and others maintain that the U.S. visit is simply a way of promoting dialogue and standing up for the respect of the Tunisian democratic process.

Tunisia has consistently been viewed as one of the notable success stories to emerge from the Arab Spring, and for that reason, there is particular concern regarding a potential backslide in democratic ideals and functions within the nation. The fear is that President Saied will continue to extend the suspension of parliament and dismissal of his cabinet whenever the deadline approaches on the emergency declaration – leaving Tunisia in a prolonged state of limbo and uncertainty. Regardless of the next moves, long-term worries exist that the situation might leave the country susceptible to falling into similar crises in the future. Advocacy organizations, both inside Tunisia and globally, are highlighting the importance of the civic process accommodating a diverse array of groups to help stabilize the political environment. The American congressional visit underlined these points in the summit with Tunisian officials in the hopes of increasing pressure on the government to solve the crisis and affirm its commitment to respect for the electoral process.

The delegation adamantly emphasized that its goal is to support the Tunisian people's desire to uphold democratic ideals and that it is not taking sides in the political crisis itself. As time goes on, uncertainty about the next steps remain as the United States and others keep a close eye on how things transpire in the coming weeks and months.