



## [Pro-Democracy Advocates Condemn Tunisian President Saied's Unilateral Move to Exclude Political Parties from the Process of Drafting a New Constitution](#)

Pro-democracy advocates have condemned a recent move by Tunisian President Kais Saied to exclude any political parties from the drafting process for a new constitution, and accused him of attempting to consolidate autocratic rule. Saied handpicked the organizations that would participate and unilaterally appointed a loyalist law professor to head the body. These included only 4 organizations, the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the employers' organization UTICA, the Tunisian League of Human Rights, and the National Bar Association. The Tunisian General Labor Union along with many academics have already said that they will not participate, due to concerns about Saied's continued anti-democratic measures and the limited dialogue structure proposed. "We reject any formal dialogue in which roles are determined unilaterally and from which civil and political forces are excluded," UGTT Spokesperson Sami Tahri said. The UGTT is Tunisia's most powerful labor union and holds a great deal of political clout. The union of over 1 million members has also recently threatened to call a strike of all workers in public services and state companies.

President Kais Saied's moves to seize power have pushed Tunisia into the biggest political crisis since the 2011 Arab Spring and have threatened to destroy many of the democratic gains made during the uprisings. Civil society organizations, opposition groups, and activists have labeled his actions a coup. Saied has tried to deny this and argue that his "reforms" are needed to save Tunisia from political gridlock, however each new measure and effort to erode the country's democratic institutions fuels further criticism of his behavior. He has dissolved the parliament, disbanded a watchdog organization within the Tunisian government that ensured judicial independence, and personally renamed the replacement to an independent electoral commission. While he enjoyed some initial support of his early actions last July because of frustration with political gridlock and socioeconomic conditions in the country, opposition to Saied has grown in recent months as the nature of his autocratic reversals has become more apparent.

Tunisia's economy and public finances are also in crisis. The government is currently in talks with the International Monetary Fund for a rescue package amid growing poverty and hardship. So far, all proposals have been shut down. The economic crisis is still ongoing and there is no real end in sight. The rising cost of commodities such as fuel and food has put a strain on the people of Tunisia. There are widespread protests around the country as well whereby citizens are voicing their discontent over Saied's march towards one-man rule. Many of those protesting are concerned that they will lose the rights and liberties that were gained during the revolution. "Our peaceful resistance will continue in the street until we restore our freedom and democracy," said one of the demonstrators, Tijani Tizaoui. Tizaoui had also participated in protests during the Arab Spring.

Saied's power grabs and unilateral decisions have destroyed many of the democratic institutions he claims to be wanting to save. The way to initiate useful reform should include all relevant stakeholders, and not just a select few who would have likely operated in a limited capacity. The Saied regime has indicated that it will proceed with or without the civil societies appointed. It was likely expected that these organizations would refuse to take part in the constitutional process, so inviting them may well have been aimed at trying to give the proposed reforms some merit. However, ultimately, the exclusion of the necessary political parties from the process delegitimizes it as a whole.