



Pro-Democracy Advocates Denounce Tunisian President Kais Saied's Move to Formally Dissolve the Country's Parliament

Pro-democracy advocates have denounced Tunisian President Kais Saied's recent move to formally dissolve the country's parliament, as he continues to draw criticism for enacting measures aimed at restoring autocratic rule and consolidating his power. Saied's maneuver came mere hours after members of the already suspended legislative body held a plenary session online. During this, they voted to end his exceptional measures, including a reversal of the suspension of parliament and the reinstatement of the prime minister. Following Saied's announcement, he also vowed that the legislators who opposed his presidential rulings in the virtual meeting would be prosecuted for "conspiring against state security." More than half of the 216 parliament members who were present at the meeting have been summoned for questioning in a clearly politically-motivated targeting of critics. This is yet another example in an alarming trend by Saied, who has been consistently initiating anti-democratic actions to try and revert Tunisia back to one-person rule.

The mass investigation against elected parliamentarians who have attempted to uphold democracy and defied Saied's efforts to destroy the political system is a notable escalation from previous moves. The intent appears to be to punish and deter those who have called Saied out for his autocratic behavior. Two of Tunisia's major political parties – Ennahda and the Free Constitutional Party – have both come out in opposition to Saied's actions despite their ideological differences. They point out that the Tunisian Constitution, created in 2014, does not allow Saied to dissolve parliament. Another powerful civil society entity, the UGTT labor union, has also, along with other political parties across the spectrum, urged Saied to hold an early election to replace the dissolved parliament.

Tunisia has been marred by a political crisis ever since July of last year when President Kais Saied sacked the government, suspended parliament, and seized a wide range of powers. He has previously dissolved the main judicial watchdog, the Supreme Judicial Council. Saied is also continuing to rid the government of any institution that would have a check over him. He is ruling by self-imposed decree and has made no moves to set up elections to replace the dissolved parliament. All signs point to him working to completely seize power in the government and return Tunisia to an authoritarian system. The country had overthrown its last dictator during the Arab Spring back in 2011.

One of the key factors that is fueling the ongoing crisis is Tunisia's struggle with economic turmoil as well. Saied used this during his campaign to become president and pledged to counter political deadlock, making multiple accusations of corruption against members of the parliament. He has claimed that he is trying to rid the government of this corruption, however many impartial observers are extremely skeptical. Additionally, analysts have highlighted that a possible development that may further worsen the situation in Tunisia is the potential of a nationwide strike by the UGTT labor union. The country is currently in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for an economic rescue package, but so far, no deal has been met. While Saied experienced support during the election and early days of his term, the views of the Tunisian citizenry toward him have become increasingly negative in light of recent anti-democratic actions. This will continue, particularly if Tunisia's economy does not make a rapid and strong recovery which is likely to be the case since prices for commodities like bread and fuel are rising due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.