

1. The profile

Naziha Rjaibe “Oum Zied”

Naziha Rjiba known as “oum Zied” is a prominent human rights defender, a brave Tunisian journalist, and one of fiercest opponents of the former Tunisian president Zain El Abidin Ben Ali’s regime, where she has always chosen to be among the allies of the victims, defending their rights and fighting for the freedom of expression and human rights.

She has a master degree in Arabic literature and civilization, and taught for 33 years at Tunisian educational institutions.

Oum Zied started writing when she was still 17 years old, then she wrote in independent Tunisian newspapers for 10 years until she was banned from publishing because of an article published with “AlRay” newspaper in December 1988 about the ousted president Zain El Din Ben Ali. After that she started publishing online in “Kalima” and “Tunis News” websites until the fall of Ben Ali on the 15th of January 2011.

Oum Zied was a human rights and freedom of expression activist through her work with the National Council for Liberties, and the Observatory for Press Freedoms, Publishing and Creation, and she initiated a branch of Pen International in Tunisia.

After the first Tunisian elections in October 2014, she founded, with a group of activists, “Yakaza” organization or “vigilance” for democracy and civil state and was its president for three years. She cofounded the party “Congrès pour la République”, but she resigned after it became a ruling party with the success of the Tunisian revolution.

Oum Zied and her family were persecuted before the Tunisian revolution. In 2008, she received a summons to appear before the prosecutor for her article in which she held the Tunisian authority accountable for blocking “Kalima” website. She was exposed to a forced attempt of an offensive inspection at the Tunisian airport after evacuation of passengers. In addition her family faced attempts to ruin their reputation, and was subject to attacks and harassments.

Oum Zied won many international Awards as it is shown below:

She won the Oxfam Novib/Pen international for freedom of expression in 2005, at a ceremony conducted in Berlin during the Pen International

conference; it is a literary award for freedom of expression, given to persecuted writers. In 2009 she was given along with Dr Mohamed Talibi and Mrs Siham Benzedrine, the freedom to publish prize by the international publishers association in Oslo.

She has received the press freedom award by the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York on the 24th of November 2009, and in December 2012, after the revolution, she won the freedom of speech award by “Akademia” foundation one of the Tunisian higher education institutions.

Despite all the criticism she faced after her husband Mukhtar El Jalaili became the minister of agriculture in the government of Beji Caid Essebsi, she kept writing online and supporting “Yakaza”. She is also working on writing a book where she is including her rich experience that is featured with bravery and sincere word, defending citizens’ rights without any discrimination, and spreading the concepts of social justice, and respect of public freedoms in Tunisia.

2. Campaign Statement

A new campaign to support human rights defenders and freedom of expression, the first human rights defender chosen is the Tunisian activist Naziha Rjiba to shed light on her human rights struggle.

(Cairo- Beirut, February 1 2017)

The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Maharat Foundation, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with IFEX chose the prominent human rights defender and the brave Tunisian journalist Naziha Rjiba also known as “Oum Zied”, an entrenched frontline defender of human rights, to be the first case within the 2017 campaign “supporting human rights defenders and freedom of speech”.

This campaign is an opportunity to shed lights on human rights defenders and freedom of expression in all Arab regions, after the success of “prisoner of the month” campaign (#theirfreedom_their right) in highlighting the issues related to imprisoned human rights defenders in the Arab countries.

The new campaign will be launched in February 2017 by the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), Maharat Foundation, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights, in cooperation with IFEX, and will select a human

rights defender every month, then an honoring ceremony will take place on the 10th of December of every year in Beirut to nominate the defender of the year that was chosen among other defenders that were part of the campaign.

It is to note that Naziha Rjiba known as “Oum Zied” is a prominent human rights defender, a brave Tunisian journalist, and one of fiercest opponents of the former Tunisian president Zain El Abidin Ben Ali’s regime; she chose to be among the youths who opposed and believed in the fall of the tyrant regime.

Oum Zied was a human rights and freedom of expression activist through her work with the National Council for Liberties, and the Observatory for Press Freedoms, Publishing and Creation, and she initiated a branch of Pen International in Tunisia.

After the first Tunisian elections in October 2014, she founded, with a group of activists, “Yakaza” organization or “vigilance” for democracy and civil state and was its president for three years. She cofounded the party “Congrès pour la République”, but she resigned after it became a ruling party with the success of the Tunisian revolution.

Oum Zied and her family were persecuted and faced attempts to ruin their reputation, and were subject to attacks and harassments.

Oum Zied won many international awards in recognition of her work; she won the Oxfam Novib/Pen international for freedom of expression in 2005. In 2009 she was given the freedom to publish prize by the international publishers association. She has received the press freedom award by the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2009, and in December 2012, after the revolution, she won the freedom of speech award by “Akademia” foundation one of the Tunisian higher education institutions.

In her defend of human rights, Naziha rjiba was characterized by bravery and sincere word, defending citizens’ rights without any discrimination, and spreading the concepts of social justice, and respect of public freedoms in Tunisia and the Arab world. She became an icon for the new generation of human rights defenders, and she is still working on supporting human rights and freedom of expression.

The profile

Naziha Rjaibe “Oum Zied”

Human rights activist

Country: Tunisia

Currently, she is active at "vigilance" association, and continuing to write online

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For more information on how to take part of this campaign please visit the websites of The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) <http://www.anhri.net>, Maharat News www.maharat-news.com, and the Gulf Centre for Human Rights www.gc4hr.org

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