

# Tunisia: What are the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution?

Thursday 10 October 2013, by [SEGHAIER Roua](#) (Date first published: 23 January 2013).

Ammar Amroussia, assistant secretary general of the Workers' Party, was attacked in public on Thursday, January 17, during a protest in the southern city of Gafsa. The demonstration had been in response to the appointment of the Gafsa Phosphate Company's new director, whom protesters accused of being affiliated with the ruling Ennahdha party. According to the Workers' Party's account, Amroussia's knife-wielding attackers belonged to one of the Leagues for the Protection of the Revolution.

This is but one of many incidences in which attacks on journalists, politicians, unionists, and civil society organizations have been attributed to the Leagues' doing. The opposition Nidaa Tounes party, the Center for Press Freedom, the Tunisian General Labor Union, the Association for Minorities' Support, and many others have blamed the Leagues for assaulting their members and buildings.

The Leagues compose an official association that was formed under the transitional government of prime minister Beji Caid Essebsi immediately following the January 14 revolution. In total, there are 17 branches and either six or seven administrations across Tunisia within the association. The Leagues claim to fund themselves with their wealthiest members financing the association's activities through donations.

Their members largely describe the association's aims in light of the revolution and the unfulfilled demands of those who went out in the streets to protest the authoritarian rule of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and ultimately brought down his regime in January 2011.

"It is composed of the revolution's participants, who believe the revolutionary path has not ended yet," Nasreddine Wazfa, the League's press attaché, told Tunisia Live.

Other perceive the goals of the Leagues to be highly politicized.

"These people work in the name of Ennahdha. They are people from Ennahdha, close to Ennahdha, former convicts hired by Ennahdha, and people whose consciences Ennahdha bought," Jilani Hammami, spokesperson of the Workers' Party, insisted in an interview with *Tunisia Live*.

Unionists and opposition parties have made similar accusations that the government tolerates the League, pointing to unsatisfactory security responses when their members were allegedly aggressed by the League.

Ennahdha has dismissed such claims that the League is affiliated with the party.

"For us [the Ennahdha party] in Sfax, we have clarified our position on the League for the Protection of the Revolution as being the same for any independent association. Some of its members might be affiliated with Ennahdha, which is completely compatible with the freedom of association," said Habib Idriss, a member of Ennahdha's regional office in Sfax.

Idriss went on to complain about the widespread misconstrual of the relationship between Ennahdha and the Leagues.

"When we [the party] say the truth concerning the League or any other association, it does not mean we are protecting it," he said.

The League too has asserted its independence from the ruling party.

"We formed the League before the formation of the [current] government. We had no Troïka to count on," said Wazfa.

The League's membership, nevertheless, is open to people of all affiliations with the exception of former regime members, Mohammed Amine Aguerbi from the League told Tunisia Live. Aguerbi is a young, yet well-known, member of the League who goes by his alias Recoba.

If the Leagues are dominated by a certain ideology, Recoba says, it is of no fault of the Leagues but rather those "people that did not care enough about the revolution to join."

Recoba was recently accused of attacking Naji Bghouri, a journalist from El Hiwar Tounsi TV channel, during the celebration of the revolution's second anniversary last week. Recoba denied being near the journalist at the time of the attack and challenged Bghouri to provide evidence to the contrary.

"Some journalists are obsessive, compulsive attention-seekers. They are arrogant, and when a civilian expresses his discontent with their work, they exaggerate the incident and cry for attention," the young League member stated.

Fahem Boukaddous, spokesperson of the Tunis Center for Press Freedom, could not disagree more with such claims by Recoba.

"The League is a danger to the existence of journalists, not just to the existence of their work[...] it punishes journalists for their ideological background," he said.

"They are militias. No more, no less."

The Leagues have defended themselves from such characterizations, calling into doubt the veracity of the accusations of violence leveled against them.

"Those allegations are biased," Wazfa said. He then expressed his puzzlement with the source of the information circulating around the nature of the Leagues' actions.

The Leagues have already filed defamation lawsuits against many high-profile individuals, including Worker's Party leader Hama Hammami and Secretary General of Al Joumhour party Maya Jribi.

"Those people have no proof of their words, but we do. Hence, they keep talking while we take legal action," Wazfa explained.

Hammami explained that the Worker's Party is pursuing a lawsuit against the League as well. In the past, the party has lacked sufficient evidence to file such a suit, he said.

"With the evidence and witnesses of the attack that Ammar Amroussia provided us with, we will be able to charge the Leagues," Hammami said.

On October 18, 2012, Lotfi Naguedh, a local coordinator for Nidaa Tounes, died in the southeastern

town of Tataouine after a protest by the League became violent and demonstrators clashed with employees of the regional union headquarters where Naguedh worked. Conflicting accounts by the Interior Ministry and Nidaa Tounes over the circumstances of Naguedh's death have not coincided on whether the coordinator died from the physical attacks he received or as a result of subsequent heart failure. Nidaa Tounes is carrying out its own investigation to determine the nature of Naguedh's death that it believes was directly caused by the physical assault on him.

"It is the League for the Protection of Terrorism, not the revolution," Taher Naguedh, a Nidaa Tounes member and the cousin of Lotfi Naguedh, told Tunisia Live.

He continued to question the very legitimacy of the Leagues' aims to achieve the demands of the revolution.

"Don't we have a state, independent branches of the government, a judiciary system, and a national constituent assembly to do the job?" he asked.

The Leagues' press attaché asserted that the League is committed to using only peaceful means to "cleanse" the media and the government in a bid to end the misuse of public funds.

"We do not care what a businessman does with his money, but we care where the public money goes. Therefore, the state-owned media should not be independent until cleansed of former regime holdovers," Wazfa explained.

The Leagues stressed that they never supported acts of aggression against journalists, politicians, and activists. If a member ever used violence to advance the Leagues' demands, one individual's actions does not speak for the entire League, argued Recoba.

Wazfa further suggested that in certain cases those civilians, who carried out these attacks and claimed affiliation with the Leagues, are not actual members but merely believe in their goals.

"Perhaps, they haven't found the strength in the government or any use in the opposition to further their demands, and they identify with us," Wazfa said.

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**P.S.**

\* 23 January 2013, 9:33 pm:

<http://www.tunisia-live.net/2013/01/23/what-is-the-league-for-the-protection-of-the-revolution/>