

Press Release

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Rached Ghannouchi awarded £45,000 in libel damages against Middle East Online Limited and Haitham El Zobaidi

In a judgment handed down on 23 July 2020, the High Court of Justice awarded Rached Ghannouchi (the leader of the Tunisian Ennahdha Party and Speaker of the Tunisian Parliament) £45,000 in libel damages in respect of an article published on 5 July 2019 by Middle East Online Limited and its Editor, Haitham El Zobaidi (who are based in London).

The article falsely alleged that Mr Ghannouchi pretends to believe in democracy whilst leading a party that is a front for a terrorist organisation, and which tolerates, encourages and actively supports terrorism both in Tunisia and abroad; and that he had allowed the receipt by his Party of money from the State of Qatar, thereby facilitating Qatar to exert improper influence over Tunisian politics. These allegations are entirely false and very seriously defamatory of Mr Ghannouchi, who denies them in the strongest terms. Neither he nor his Party receive any funding from the State of Qatar. An earlier press release, available [here](#), set out the background to this litigation in detail.

This award was made after a hearing to assess damages, which was held on 10 June 2020. The judgment remarked on the seriousness of the allegations, in circumstances where Mr Ghannouchi “*has a very real UK connection and reputation*”, and where the allegations had been published “*at a time where foreign governmental interference in domestic politics is a matter of worldwide speculation and concern*”. Mr Ghannouchi has indicated that he will donate the damages he receives from Middle East Online Limited and Haitham El Zobaidi to a Tunisian charity.

As well as paying Mr Ghannouchi damages, Middle East Online Limited and Haitham El Zobaidi have been ordered to pay his costs and to publish a composite summary of the Order for default judgment and of the assessment of damages judgment on the Middle East Online Limited website.

A full copy of the judgment is available [here](#).

For further information, please contact Nigel Tait (Nigel.Tait@carter-ruck.com) or Mathilde Groppo (Mathilde.Groppo@carter-ruck.com).

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