

Tunisia newspapers accuse new head of censorship

Tunisian newspaper staff on Thursday [30 August 2012] accused their controversial new director, appointed by the Islamist-led government, of censoring an article criticising his nomination.

Two state-owned dailies were to publish a piece condemning the appointment of Lotfi Touati, who they consider too close to the ruling Ennahda party, and announcing a 11 September strike, journalist and unionist Sana Farhat told AFP.

Touati stopped the printing of *Le Temps* and *Essabah* on Wednesday night, called the police to the office where staff were protesting and replaced the column with advertisements, Farhat said.

"It was censored... this is harassment," she said.

"The new heads want to control the newspapers' editorial line," Farhat added, accusing the director of taking orders from the government.

The national union of journalists and international NGOs have criticised the Tunis government for seeking to manipulate the media, including by appointing new directors to head public media groups without consulting their staff.

Touati heads the Dar Assabah press group, which incorporates Arabic-language *Essabah* and French-language *Le Temps*.

Reporters Without Borders on Wednesday condemned the government for tightening its control of state media, highlighting the "urgent need" for independent regulation of the broadcasting sector.

The authorities say they are working to remove from the media landscape those who worked for the ousted regime of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Source: AFP