

# Nomination form International Memory of the World Register

*title of item being proposed*

“The Abolition of Slavery in Tunisia 1841–1846”

ID Code [2016-50]

## **-1.0 Summary (max 200 words)**

*Give a brief description of the documentary heritage being nominated and the reasons for proposing it.*

*This is the “shop window” of your nomination and is best written **last!** It should contain all the essential points you want to make, so that anyone reading it can understand your case even if they do not read the rest of your nomination.*

Tunisia was the first country in the Muslim world to officially abolish slavery at the end of the first half of the nineteenth century, between 1841 and 1846. The documents related to this major event in Tunisia’s modern history are evidence of the wish of the Tunisian elite to lead a number of reforms deeply affecting Tunisian society at every level.

Indeed, in January 1846, Ahmad Pasha Bey (1837–1855) promulgated a decree to permanently abolish slavery, two years before the abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848, which was one of the outward signs of a modernist and reformist movement.

This decision was unprecedented in the Muslim world at the time.

The reading of the decree, circulars, correspondence, notarial deeds, and tax records, kept in the National Archives of Tunisia, highlights a series of increasingly impactful events in this process from the closing of the slave markets, the abolition of taxes collected by the state from the activity of these markets, the emancipation of children born into slave families and all slaves entering Tunisia, and finally the permanent abolition of slavery.

The abolition of slavery in Tunisia was encouraged and applauded by the western world as being the result of the humanistic and forward-looking thinking of the Tunisian elite.

## **2.0 Nominator**

### **2.1 Name of nominator (person or organization)**

National Archives of Tunisia.

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## 2.2 Relationship to the nominated documentary heritage

The National Archives of Tunisia is the institution responsible for the conservation, protection and disclosure of the archival documents proposed.

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## 2.3 Contact person(s) (to provide information on nomination)

Mr Hédi Jallab, Director-General of the National Archives of Tunisia.

Mrs Hasna Trii, Director of information use at the National Archives of Tunisia.

Mr Hatem El Hattab, Head of the department for cultural and educational activities at the National Archives of Tunisia.

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## 2.4 Contact details

<i>Name:</i> Hédi Jallab	<i>Address:</i> 122, Boulevard 9 Avril 1938, 1030 Tunis, Tunisia.
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<i>Telephone:</i> 00216-71 575 700. 00216-96659089	<i>Facsimile:</i> 00216-71 569 175.	<i>Email:</i> archives.nationales@ati.email.tn hedijallab@yahoo.fr
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## 3.0 Identity and description of the documentary heritage

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

If inscribed, the exact title and institution(s) to appear on the certificate should be given

“The Abolition of Slavery in Tunisia 1841–1846”.

Date range: 1841–1900\*

- Archival references:
- Historical set, box 230, file 421.
- Series A, box 281, file 1. Sub files: 1–22
- Series J, box 2/1890, file 5.
- Records: 759–800.

*In this part of the form you must describe the document or collection in sufficient detail to make clear precisely what you are nominating. Any collection must be finite (with beginning and end dates) and closed.*

\* In addition to the legal abolition of slavery, further administrative and legal steps, that were relatively spread out over time, were taken to eradicate this phenomenon in society and consolidate the new status of slaves who had been emancipated as free subjects.

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### 3.4 History/provenance

*Describe what you know of the history of the collection or document. Your knowledge may not be complete, but give the best description you can.*

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#### 4.0 Legal information

##### 4.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Name: National Archives of Tunisia      Address: 122, Boulevard 9 Avril 1938, 1030 Tunis, Tunisia.

Telephone: 00216-71 575 700      Facsimile: 00216-71 569 175      Email: archives.nationales@ati.email.tn

##### 4.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details if different from the owner)

Name      Address

Telephone      Facsimile      Email

##### 4.3 Legal status

Provide details of legal and administrative responsibility for the preservation of the documentary heritage

The National Archives of Tunisia is a public institution that depends on the Presidency of the Tunisian government and is responsible for the conservation, preservation, and disclosure of public archives including the archival documents proposed.

##### 4.4 Accessibility

Describe how the item(s) / collection may be accessed  
All access restrictions should be explicitly stated below:

The archival documents proposed are described according to the ISAD(G) standard adopted by the International Council on Archives, indexed according to an authoritative list created and updated by specialists from the National Archives of Tunisia, and entered into two data bases for reference purposes, allowing both Tunisian and foreign researchers to consult the files including the documents proposed.

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Access to the files is in line with the provisions of the laws relating to the disclosure of public archives and access to information. The proposed documents are in the process of being digitized and made accessible online.

*Encouraging accessibility is a basic objective of MoW. Accordingly, digitization for access purposes is encouraged and you should comment on whether this has been done or is planned. You should also note if there are legal or cultural factors that restrict access.*

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#### **4.5 Copyright status**

Describe the copyright status of the item(s) / collection

The archival documents proposed belong to the inalienable public domain of the State of Tunisia.

*Where copyright status is known, it should be stated. However, the copyright status of a document or collection has **no bearing** on its significance and is not taken into account in determining whether it meets the criteria for inscription.*

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### **5.0 Assessment against the selection criteria**

#### **5.1 Authenticity.**

*Is the documentary heritage what it appears to be? Have identity and provenance been reliably established?*

All of the proposed documents are genuine. Incidentally, none of the documents are either copies or replicas. The documents have been authenticated by all the researchers who have consulted them and used them for their publications and books. All the information contained within these documents, related to the places, events, people and time, is trustworthy and can be verified in historic sources and archives of other countries, particularly Mediterranean countries. As a matter of fact, the decree, circulars, records, correspondence and notarial deeds come from the archives of the State of Tunisia and were produced by its government.

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## 5.2 World significance

*Is the heritage unique and irreplaceable? Would its disappearance constitute a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity? Has it created great impact over time and/or within a particular cultural area of the world? Has it had great influence (positive or negative) on the course of history?*

The proposed documents contain information relating to the abolition of slavery that cannot be found anywhere else. Other archives dating from the same time and preserved by international archival institutions contain only fragmented information, especially in relation to the precise circumstances and the intellectual, legal, and administrative process of abolishing slavery and the integration of emancipated slaves into society at the time. Even if there may be similar documents to the ones being proposed here in the western world they would certainly not be like the ones in the Arab and Muslim world of that time.

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## 5.3 Comparative criteria:

***Does the heritage meet any of the following tests? (It must meet at least one of them.)***

### **1 Time**

*Is the document evocative of its time (which may have been a time of crisis, or significant social or cultural change? Does it represent a new discovery? Or is it the “first of its kind”?*

During the reign of Ahmad Pasha Bey (1837–1855), several reforms were carried out in the military, administrative, political, and economic domains, with the aim of modernising Tunisia in the same way as European nations that were experiencing economic, political, and military growth.

Therefore, the permanent abolition of slavery in 1846 was an important turning point that heralded an era of equality between the subjects of the Regency, regardless of race. This revolutionary decision prepared the ground for the promulgation of the Fundamental Pact in 1857, a type of declaration of rights which, like the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, guaranteed the security of people’s lives and property, and granted equality of taxation, equality before the law, and freedom of thought. These reforms led to the promulgation of the 1861 constitution in Tunis, the first in the Muslim world before the Ottoman constitution of 1876.

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## 2 Place

*Does the document contain crucial information about a locality important in world history and culture? For example, was the location itself an important influence on the events or phenomena represented by the document? Does it describe physical environments, cities or institutions that have since vanished?*

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the regency of Tunis became involved in a movement intertwining three groups: the Maghreb, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe. Thanks to its geopolitical situation, it enjoyed a status as a testing ground in a number of domains such as architecture, teaching, law, and politics. Tunis became a place of innovation and change; a place where initiative was taken and ideas were exchanged. In Istanbul, people followed events in Cairo with interest. Tunis watched and maintained links with these two capitals and nearby Europe. The military reform initiated in Tunis was linked to Egyptian and ottoman reforms with the aid of instruction from Europe. However, beyond such cross-influences, fundamental changes were made in Tunis thanks to its elite of modernist reformers who made a mark on their history for ever.

## 3 People

*Does the cultural context of the document's creation reflect significant aspects of human behaviour, or of social, industrial, artistic or political development? Or does it capture the essence of great movements, transitions, advances or regression? Does it illustrate the lives of prominent individuals in the above fields?*

The abolition of slavery through the proposed documents reflects the evolution, self-sacrifice and perseverance of a modernist and progressive elite including the minister Kheireddine, the intellectual, Salem Bouhajeb, and senior civil servants such as general Hussein and Ibn Abi Dhiaf.

## 4 Subject and theme

*Does the subject matter of the document represent particular historical or intellectual developments in the natural, social and human sciences? Or in politics, ideology, sport or the arts?*

The abolition of slavery in Tunisia was part of a set of modernist reforms which profoundly changed Tunisian society and deserves to be known due to the fact that it was among the boldest initiatives in the world at the time. The abolition of slavery demonstrates a nation's degree of maturity and its evolution towards freedom and legality.

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## 5 Form and style

*Does the document have outstanding aesthetic, stylistic or linguistic value? Or is it a typical exemplar of a type of presentation, custom or medium? Is it an example of a disappeared or disappearing carrier or format?*

There is quite a wide range of types of documents proposed. Among them are records, correspondence, decrees, circulars and notarial deeds. Almost all of these documents are written in different languages such as Arabic, French, Italian, and English, and reflect the legal, administrative and diplomatic style of various countries at the time.

## 6 Social/ spiritual/ community significance:

*Application of this criterion must reflect living significance – does documentary heritage have an emotional hold on people who are alive today? Is it venerated as holy or for its mystical qualities, or revered for its association with significant people and events?*

The documents, which evidence the abolition of slavery, are of great importance to Tunisians. They are proof of the country's transition to modernity.

*(Once those who have revered the documentary heritage for its social/ spiritual/ community significance no longer do so, or are no longer living, it loses this specific significance and may eventually acquire historical significance.)*

## 6.0 Contextual information

### 6.1 Rarity

The documents we propose cannot be found in the archival holdings of any other countries. Tunisia is one of the rare countries that has in its archives the decree, circulars, correspondence and documents institutionalizing the permanent abolition of slavery at that time.

### 6.2 Integrity

There are no gaps in the documents we propose.

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