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Houssem Cherif: two years, two awards and an AI that serves people

He did not come up through the elite AI schools. He trained, he persevered, and Montreal honoured him two years running. A portrait of a Tunisian who wants AI to be useful, ethical and sovereign.

BY THE **EDITORS** · NOVEMBER 29, 2026 · 5 MIN READ



Houssem Cherif (centre) receiving the CyberTalent Award in Montreal.

Two years, two awards, one city. In November 2026, Houssem Cherif was named winner of the 2026 CyberTalent Award in the Innovation category, a Montreal honour that showcases talent in cybersecurity and digital technology, associated with the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, the city's police force, and with Cybereco. A year earlier, in October 2025, he had already received the trophy in the Achievement category, at Complexe Desjardins. For the Tunisian press, which widely celebrated the news, the story is simple: a Tunisian in Montreal has come out on top, back to back, in one of the most competitive fields of the moment.

But above all, Houssem Cherif's story is one of a path that owes nothing to the well-worn routes.

Off the beaten path

Houssem Cherif did not come through the traditional programs of the top artificial intelligence schools. His training is technical: IT support, network infrastructure, telecommunications. Settled in Quebec for a few years now, he joined the program at CyberCap, a Montreal organization that trains young people in digital skills and cybersecurity, then completed a six-month internship there. For nearly a year after that, he took part in the organization's podcasts and in its show Les héros de la persévérance, or “Heroes of Perseverance.”

The word was not chosen by chance. Step by step, he made his place. A community organization, Révèl'Action, gave him responsibilities that helped him establish himself as a consultant. Today, he helps nonprofit organizations adopt artificial intelligence, and he serves as an observer within the international AI Global Observers Network.

> **“An imperfect project is better than a perfect idea sleeping in a drawer.”**
>
> HOUSSEM CHERIF, RÉALITÉS, NOVEMBER 2026 (TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH)

Three projects, one idea

The 2026 award recognizes a set of projects that share one conviction: artificial intelligence must start from a real problem and serve real people.

The first, VisionCare AI, of which he is a partner and co-founder, offers an eye pre-diagnosis from images of the eye taken with an ordinary phone. The goal is not to replace the ophthalmologist, but to help spot vision problems earlier and encourage people to see a doctor, while respecting users' privacy.

The second, EcoVilleray, carried out with Révèl'Action, helps businesses in Montreal's Villeray neighbourhood manage their surpluses better and adopt eco-friendly practices, thanks to frugal artificial intelligence, meaning AI that is sparing with data and energy.

The third, Sentinelle IA, grew out of the TrustScan AI project honoured in 2025 and takes on disinformation: the tool flags dubious content, cross-checks sources and runs on local artificial intelligence. The issue matters so much to him that he also designed, as a volunteer, Expert Antifake, a game that raises awareness about fake news.

HIS JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

Tunisia	Training in IT support, networking and telecommunications.
Montreal	Program and internship at CyberCap; podcasts and the show Les héros de la persévérance.
Oct. 2025	CyberTalent trophy, Achievement category, for TrustScan AI.
2026	AI consultant for nonprofits; co-founder of VisionCare AI; EcoVilleray and Sentinelle IA projects.
Nov. 2026	2026 CyberTalent Award, Innovation category.

A sovereign artificial intelligence

Ask Houssem Cherif about his vision and he talks about ethics before he talks about technology. He champions frugal artificial intelligence, open-source tools and security built in by design, and readily cites the Montréal Declaration for a Responsible Development of Artificial Intelligence. Above all, he rejects the idea of a machine that would decide in place of humans.

> **“My goal is not to replace human judgment.”**
>
> HOUSSEM CHERIF, RÉALITÉS, NOVEMBER 2026 (TRANSLATED FROM FRENCH)

One line sums up his thinking: “AI must be a lever for sovereignty, not for dependence.” It is a conviction he applies to Tunisia as well. Rather than speak of a brain drain, he prefers to talk about a circulation of skills, and he dreams of an artificial intelligence awareness program for young Tunisians, inspired by the community organizations that helped him in Montreal. He is also involved with the Réseau tuniso-canadien, a Tunisian-Canadian network.

While many look at artificial intelligence with unease, Houssem Cherif has chosen to make it a tool that serves patients, neighbourhood merchants and citizens. That may well be his finest innovation.

TUNISIAN PRIDE

Houssem Cherif proves that perseverance opens every door. Honoured twice in Montreal, he showcases a Tunisia that innovates with ethics and with heart.

SOURCES

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Facts checked by the Tunisian Success editors in November 2026. Spotted an error? Write to us at contact@tunisiansuccess.com.