

29 May 2019

Algeria: Kamal Eddine Fekhar dies of medical negligence on hunger strike while targeting of human rights defenders continues

On 28 May 2019, **Kamal Eddine Fekhar** died in the Frantz Fanon hospital in the city of Blida, after almost 2 months spent in the prison of Ghardaia on an open-ended hunger strike, along with **Hadj Ibrahim Aouf**. Both human rights defenders have been subjected to medical negligence.

[Kamal Eddine Fekhar](#) was a medical doctor, the founder of Tifawt, a foundation that works to protect and promote the rights of the Amazigh people, and member of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights. [Hadj Ibrahim Aouf](#) is a trade unionist and Mozabite minority rights defender.

Due to their rapidly deteriorating health, on 27 April 2019, Kamal Eddine Fekhar and Hadj Ibrahim Aouf were transferred to the hospital of Ghardaia. They were put in the prison ward of the hospital where they received poor medical care. Their lawyer, Salah Dabouz, visited them in the hospital and reported inhumane conditions in the prison ward, with the human rights defenders being chained to their beds and suffering from skin infections as a result of poor hygiene in the ward. Their repeated requests to see a doctor were rejected. On 28 May 2019, around 2am, Kamal Eddine Fekhar died as a result of medical negligence.

On 31 March 2019, Kamal Eddine Fekhar was arrested near his workplace along with his two children. On the same day, Hadj Ibrahim Aouf was also arrested. The human rights defenders were detained for criticising public institutions, namely the military, Parliament and judiciary, based on a complaint made by the general prosecutor of the city of Ghardaia. They declared an open-ended hunger strike to protest against their arbitrary arrest and prosecution. The health of both human rights defenders rapidly deteriorated as a result of the hunger strike as well as medical negligence in the prison of Ghardaia.

This is not the first time a detained human rights defender has died while on hunger strike in Algeria. [Mohamed Tamalt](#) was a human rights defender and journalist who was openly critical of the Algerian government's human rights record. He died on 11 December 2016 after being detained since 27 June 2016. Mohamed Tamalt went on hunger strike right after he was arrested to protest against the arbitrariness of his detention. His health continued to deteriorate rapidly and he was transferred to a hospital in August 2016. It was only then that his family noticed he had a scar on his head that may have been connected to his subsequent death. The circumstances surrounding the death of Mohamed Tamalt are concerning and there is a need for an impartial and transparent investigation into his death.

The arrest of Kamal Eddine Fekhar and Hadj Ibrahim Aouf forms part of a pattern of ongoing retaliation against human rights defenders, journalists, student activists, trade unionists and lawyers, which has intensified since the start of massive protests in the country. On 8 April 2019, the lawyer of the human rights defenders and former President of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), [Salah Dabouz](#), was arrested by security forces during a meeting in a restaurant in the capital. The human rights defender was taken to the city of Ghardaia

where he was questioned about his posts on Facebook criticising the judiciary. He was released the next day but kept under “administrative observation”. As part of this procedure, he has to appear at the police station in Ghardaia every Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday. The city is located around 600 km from Algiers, where the human rights defender lives and works. This procedure is a clear attempt to stop Salah Dabouz from participating in the protests in the capital.

As reported by Salah Dabouz, this is the first time since 1962 that this administrative procedure is being used by the Algerian authorities, which reflects their attempt to prevent the human rights defender from attending his court hearings and continuing his work as a human rights lawyer.

[Abdullah Benaoum](#) is a human rights defender and social media activist, currently serving a one-year prison sentence in solitary confinement for politically motivated charges related to his human rights activism in Algeria. 29 May 2019 marks the 80th day of his hunger strike, which he has started to denounce the inhumane conditions of his detention. The human rights defender’s health has been rapidly deteriorating due to the length of his hunger strike and prior health issues. The family and lawyer of Abdullah Benaoum have reported that he is currently in a critical condition and they fear for his life.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the inhumane treatment of Kamal Eddine Fekhar in the prison and hospital of Ghardaia which is believed to have led to his death. Front Line Defenders further condemns the ongoing harassment and medical negligence of human rights defenders in Algeria, which is believed to be solely motivated by their peaceful and legitimate work denouncing corruption, injustice and human rights violations in the country.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Algeria to:

1. Strongly condemn the medical negligence against Kamal Eddine Fekhar in detention;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death of Kamal Eddine Fekhar and the medical negligence of the prison and hospital authorities, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Immediately drop all charges against Hadj Brahim Aouf, Abdullah Benaoum and Salah Dabouz, as they are believed to be solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
4. Immediately and unconditionally release Hadj Brahim Aouf and Abdullah Benaoum and provide the necessary medical treatment for them;
5. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death of Mohamed Tamalt, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
6. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of human rights defenders in Algeria;

7. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Algeria and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including judicial harassment.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”* and to Article 18 (2): *“Individuals, groups, and non-governmental organisations have an important role to play and a responsibility in safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and contributing to the promotion and advancement of democratic societies, institutions and processes.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above cases.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director

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