

26 April 2019

## Algeria: An ongoing uprising amid intimidation and harassment of human rights defenders

26 April 2019 marks the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the open-ended hunger strike of human rights defenders Kamal Eddine Fekhar and Hadj Ibrahim Aouf.

[Kamal Eddine Fekhar](#), Mozabite minority rights defender, founder of Tifawt and member of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, was arrested near his workplace along with his two minor children on 31 March 2019. On the same day, trade unionist and minority rights defender [Hadj Ibrahim Aouf](#) was also arrested. The human rights defenders were detained for attacking 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. The health of Hadj Ibrahim Aouf is rapidly deteriorating, as he is entering the 27<sup>th</sup> day of hunger strike.

The arrest of the human rights defenders 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 17 April 2019, armed agents from the Research and Intervention Brigade (BRI), wearing plain clothes, broke into the Said Hamdine Faculty of Law in Algiers to pursue and arrest student activists who were gathering there.

On 13 April 2019, police stopped several activists as they attempted to join a sit-in planned for 5:00 pm in front of the main post office in Algiers. They were arrested and taken to Baraki's police station. A journalist and three women activists from the association **Rassemblement Action Jeunesse (RAJ)** were forced to strip naked. One of the RAJ activists said that at 9:00 pm, they were taken to a room where a woman in plain clothes, who claimed to be a police officer, said she would conduct a body search and ordered the women to strip naked. As stated by one of the activists, they were threatened that they would not be released unless they got completely naked. Upon their release on 14 April 2019 at 1:00 am, the women activists reported ill-treatment by the police officers.

[Abdou Semmar](#), a journalist actively working on exposing corruption in Algeria, currently exiled in France, received threats on several occasions and on 10 April 2019, his wife's car was burnt to the ground in front of her workplace in Oued Romen, Algiers. The human rights defender reports on corruption and abuse of power by Abdou Semmar in Algeria through the Paris based media outlet Algeria Part.

On 8 April 2019, [Salah Dabouz](#), a lawyer, human rights defender and former President of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), 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 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.

On 7 April 2019, [Meziane Abane](#), a journalist at Al Watan newspaper and human rights defender advocating for the rights of the Amazigh people in Algeria, was arrested while he was covering the protests. He saw members of the security forces chasing protesters and arresting those who resisted. When police officers ordered the human rights defender to leave, he refused, saying he

was a journalist doing his job. They arrested him along with eight protesters and took them to the Rue Asslah Hocine police station, where they were held for hours.

[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. 26 April 2019 marks the 47<sup>th</sup> 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.

22 April 2019 marked two months since peaceful demonstrations erupted in Algerian cities on 22 February 2019 to prevent President Abdelaziz Bouteflika from seeking a 5th mandate after holding power for nearly 20 years. Up until 2011, Algeria was under a state of emergency with an increasingly shrinking space for civil society and massive targeting of human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, bloggers and human rights organisations.

As a result of public pressure, President Bouteflika announced that he would not be running for office again. Yet millions of Algerians called for him to step down immediately due to his clear physical incapacity to serve as president, as he had hardly appeared in public or addressed the nation in the last 5 years. The protesters' demands for transparency and the peaceful transfer of power were only partially met. In an open letter to the Algerian people, President Bouteflika declared that he would resign on 2 April 2019, before the end of his mandate set for 28 April 2019.

On 9 April 2019, the Parliament appointed the President of the Nation Council (upper house of the Parliament) Abdel Kader Ben Salah as interim president for 90 days. According to Article 102 of the Constitution, during this period, he should convene presidential elections.

Meanwhile, peaceful protests continued to grow in Algeria, opposing the constitutional solution suggested by the government and calling for a peaceful transition and accountability for all the crimes committed by the allies of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, including the military.

The change of the head of state was accompanied by some positive changes, as several businessmen and state officials known to have engaged in corruption were arrested or summoned for interrogation by the judicial police. Yet, despite the government's promises of a peaceful, democratic transition, the human rights situation in the country remains unstable. Security forces, initially neutral towards the popular uprising, have started to act more violently in order to repress the social movement, and several incidents of excessive use of force have been reported.

During the first week of protests, on 23 February 2019, the Directorate General of National Security (DGSN) declared the arrest of 41 people on charges of disruption of public order, acts of vandalism, violence and assault.

Front Line Defenders strongly condemns the ongoing wave of arbitrary arrests and repression by the Algerian authorities targeting human rights defenders, journalists, student activists, trade unionists and lawyers.

### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Algeria to:**

1. Immediately release all the imprisoned human rights defenders and quash their convictions as Front Line Defenders believes that they have been targeted solely as a result of their legitimate human rights work;
2. Immediately and unconditionally remove all restrictions on the free movement of all human rights defenders in Algeria and cease all further forms of surveillance or harassment against them, as it is believed that these measures are not only solely related to their legitimate human rights activities but, furthermore, constitute a direct transgression of the rights of human rights defenders;

3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of human rights defenders, as well as that of their families;
4. 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 6 (b and c): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (c) To study, discuss, form and hold opinions on the observance, both in law and in practice, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms and, through these and other appropriate means, to draw public attention to those matters”*, and to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (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.”*

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

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson  
Executive Director