

15 July 2019

### **Algeria: Ongoing crackdown on human rights defenders and continuous judicial harassment of Mozabite minority rights defenders Salah Dabouz and Aouf Hadj Ibrahim**

On 8 July 2019, human rights defender and lawyer Salah Dabouz started an open-ended hunger strike in protest at the judicial harassment he has been facing since 9 April 2019.

[Salah Dabouz](#) is a prominent Algerian human rights defender and a defense attorney representing several activists across Algeria. Salah Dabouz previously served as the President of the *Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme* (Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, LADDH), an independent association founded in 1985 and working on the documentation of human rights violations in Algeria committed by security services and armed groups. Salah Dabouz is also a member of the Commission on Human Rights of the International Union of Lawyers and a founding member of the Autonomous Union of Lawyers in Algeria.

On 8 July 2019, the human rights defender went on hunger strike which he started to denounce the judicial harassment against him and the subsequent rejection of all the complaints he tried to lodge with the different judicial authorities to demand justice for his clients and himself.

Salah Dabouz was arrested on 8 April 2019 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 judicial authority in Ghardaia. He was released the following day but kept under "Judicial Observation". As part of this procedure, he has to appear at the police station in Ghardaia every Wednesday and Sunday. The city is located about 600 km from Algiers, where the human rights defender lives and works. This excessive administrative procedure has not been used since 1962 in Algeria, indicating that it constitutes an act of retaliation against the human rights defender and an attempt to prevent him from carrying out his work as a human rights lawyer and participating in the protests in the capital.

To oppose this arbitrary procedure, Salah Dabouz filed numerous complaints with the Republic's Prosecutor against the Prosecutor General of the city of Ghardaia, as well as an unsuccessful request to have the procedure lifted. The Court of First Instance dismissed his complaints without reference to the Supreme Court, even though the Algerian law on criminal procedures requires that. Instead, on 30 April 2019, the Court of First Instance confirmed the "Judicial Observation" of Salah Dabouz and extended the measure by one additional day per week.

In two instances in June 2019, the Clerk of the Indictment Division of the Court of First Instance refused to give him a copy of the file and refused to take the request, referring to instructions from the president of the Court.

On 27 June 2019, Salah Dabouz submitted a complaint to the Prosecutor's Office for insults and death threats he received in front of the Court of Ghardaia.

Following the same pattern, Salah Dabouz's clients and fellow human rights defenders [Hadj Brahim Aouf](#) and [Kamal Eddine Fekhar](#) were also arrested and harassed. They declared an open-ended hunger strike to protest against their arbitrary arrest which led to their transfer to a health facility in atrocious conditions, an incident that ended with [the death of prominent human rights defender Kamal Eddine Fekhar as a result of medical negligence](#). Aouf Hadj Brahim was released on 30 May 2019 upon the death of his co detainee Kamal Eddine Fekhar, and now suffers serious medical consequences resulting from the incarceration and the medical negligence he suffered during his hunger strike. He is being subjected to the same judicial observation procedure as Salah Dabouz.

There are four pending cases against Aouf Hadj Ibrahim that are linked to his trade union work and his work exposing and denouncing corruption committed by state institutions in Ghardaia on social media. The human rights defender is facing charges of “incitement to hatred”, “insulting state institutions” and “defamation”.

The pattern of escalating judicial harassment of human rights defenders, journalists, trade union activists, and student activists along with the alarming number of arrests during the recent protests, come amid a complex political context and an increasing level of violence from the side of the military *de facto* leader of the state, Ahmed Gaid Salah. The interim chief of state Abdelkader Ben Salah’s mandate came to an end on 9 July 2019 and no timeline for the upcoming elections has been set yet which pushes the country towards a constitutional crisis.

Front Line Defenders is extremely concerned at the escalating judicial harassment of minority rights defenders in Algeria and believes it is solely motivated by their peaceful and legitimate work in the defence of human rights in Algeria and the exercise of their right to freedom of expression to denounce corruption, injustice and human rights violations.

**Front Line Defenders urge the authorities in Algeria to:**

1. Allow Salah Dabouz immediate and unfettered access to justice and facilitate his access to judicial remedies;
2. Immediately put an end to the judicial observation of the two defenders Salah Dabouz and Aouf Hadj Ibrahim, and drop all charges against them and all the peaceful protestors who were arrested during the protests as it is believed that they are solely motivated by their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
3. Cease the targetting of minority rights defenders in Algeria and the repression of peaceful protests;
4. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of human rights defenders in Algeria;
5. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders and organisations in Algeria are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.

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