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(Photo by -/AFP via Getty Images)

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Algeria: Authorities step up crackdown on peaceful dissent in the face of new expressions of discontent

In response to a new online protest movement and in the lead up to the sixth anniversary of the Hirak movement in February 2025, Algerian authorities have intensified their relentless clampdown on peaceful dissent through arbitrary arrests and unjust prosecutions leading to lengthy prison sentences, said Amnesty International.

Over the past five months, Algerian authorities have arrested and convicted at least 23 activists and journalists, particularly in relation to their support to the “Manich Radi” [I am not satisfied] online protest movement, launched in December 2024 to denounce restrictions on human rights and difficult socioeconomic conditions in the country. All have been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their human rights, with the majority currently serving prison sentences or awaiting trial.

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Nothing can justify detaining and jailing people solely for having expressed dissatisfaction about political and socioeconomic conditions.

Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“The trajectory of suffocating online activism pursued by the Algerian authorities is alarming and must be reversed. Nothing can justify detaining and jailing people solely for having expressed dissatisfaction about political and socioeconomic conditions. All those detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression must be immediately released,” said Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

Amnesty International investigated nine illustrative cases of activists and journalists targeted for their online expression. Seven of them were convicted and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to five years solely for their online expression and activism. Five defendants were tried in expedited proceedings that did not provide time for adequate defence, undermining their right to a fair trial. Authorities also detained an activist and a journalist for several days and subjected the latter to an abusive and arbitrary ban on travel and issuing publications.



The latest spate of arbitrary arrests and unjust prosecutions demonstrates the Algerian authorities' clear resolve to crush all expressions of discontent.

Heba Morayef, Amnesty International's Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“The latest spate of arbitrary arrests and unjust prosecutions demonstrates the Algerian authorities' clear resolve to crush all expressions of discontent online and punish people simply for exercising their human rights and denouncing injustice,” said Heba Morayef.

Authorities must end their crackdown on peaceful dissent and stop punishing the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression. Authorities should also promptly, thoroughly, independently, impartially, transparently and effectively investigate allegations of human rights violations and bring to justice anyone suspected to be responsible in fair trial. Authorities should also ensure access to justice and effective remedies for victims.

The organization's findings are based on a review of relevant court rulings, legal documents, relevant social media content posted by the victims, media reports and interviews with 11 people who provided consent for publication.

On 11 March 2025, the Bejaia Court upheld the conviction of activists Soheib Debbaghi and Mahdi Bazizi in expedited trial proceedings, sentencing them to 18 months in prison

and a fine of DZA 100,000 (EUR 693). The conviction relates to the launch of the “Manich Radi” movement by Soheib Debbaghi and Samy Bazizi – Mahdi Bazizi’s brother, who lives in Canada – in December 2024 to express their frustration with the political and socioeconomic situation in Algeria, including the repression of human rights. The hashtag was relayed by thousands of people and drew comments from Algerian President Abdelmajid Tebboune, who stated on 24 December 2024: “Let no one think that Algeria can be preyed upon by a hashtag”.

Soheib Debbaghi was convicted of “publishing content harmful to national interest”, “publishing content harmful to national order and security” and “inciting an unarmed gathering” based on social media posts relaying the “#Manich_Radi” hashtag. Mahdi Bazizi was convicted of “hiding a person to obstruct the course of justice” in reference to Soheib Debbaghi’s attempt to avoid arrest.

On 20 January 2025, only four days after his arrest, the tribunal of Rouiba in Algiers sentenced renowned activist and poet Mohamed Tadjadit to five years in prison and a DZD 500,000 (EUR 3,465) fine following expedited proceedings. His conviction was solely based on social media content and digital communications, including posts relaying the “#Manich_Radi” hashtag and poetry with political messages. The court found him guilty of “undermining national unity”, “publishing content harmful to national interest”, “inciting to an unarmed gathering” and “offending public bodies”.

On 4 March, the tribunal of Tizi Ouzou, northeastern Algeria, also convicted activist Belaid Charfi of “publishing content harmful to national interest” and sentenced him to four years in prison and a DZD 100,000 (EUR 693) fine and DZD 10,000 (EUR 69) in civil damages. The conviction followed expedited trial proceedings and was solely based on social media posts including sharing the “Manich_Radi” hashtag and other political messages denouncing the detention of other activists and the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions.

Authorities also arrested activist and unionist Fadhila Hammas on 21 February 2025 in the northeastern town of Azazga. Police questioned her about her opinions and Facebook posts on political and human rights issues. Four days later, a public prosecutor ordered her release pending her trial on 11 May for “publishing false information susceptible to harm public order and security.” If convicted, she faces up to three years in prison.

On 16 February 2025, the Court of Ouargla, eastern Algeria, upheld the conviction of activist “Abla” Derama Kemari and sentenced her to three years in prison – including one year suspended – and a fine of DZD 300,000 (EUR 2,079). Authorities convicted her on charges of “offense to the president” and “creating an online account to incite hatred and discrimination” for Facebook posts denouncing socioeconomic issues in the Algerian Saharan regions and the repression of activists.

On 14 January 2025, the Court of Tizi Ouzou also upheld a verdict against activist Massinissa Lakhel in connection with his online activities. The court sentenced him to three years in prison and DZD 5,000,000 (EUR 34,645) in fines as well as DZD 200,000 (EUR 1,386) in civil damages based on his activity on Facebook, including following accounts and sharing publications allegedly supporting the Movement for Self-Determination of the Kabylie (MAK) — which the authorities designated as “terrorist” in a process not conforming with international human rights standards. His conviction was also based on his ties with other MAK activists, including his father, Ammar Lakhel, a former MAK representative in Canada.

Among the journalists targeted by the authorities is Abdelwaheb Moualek who was convicted by the tribunal of Sidi Aich in Bejaia on 25 February following expedited proceedings, without a lawyer. He was found guilty of “publishing content harmful to national interest” and sentenced to 18 months in prison and a fine of DZA 100,000 (EUR 693) for a Facebook publication commenting on repression. He remains free pending appeal.

On 2 January 2025 an investigative judge at the tribunal of Annaba, eastern Algeria, questioned journalist Mustapha Bendjama about his Facebook publications and placed him under judicial supervision for publishing content “harmful to national interest” and “false information susceptible to harm public order and security”. The judge imposed a formal travel ban on him for travel out of Algeria and out of the region of Annaba and banned him from issuing publications that could “undermine national interest”.

Background

Since the “Hirak” protest movement began in February 2019, the Algerian authorities have weaponized the criminal justice system to clamp down on peaceful dissent, arbitrarily arresting and prosecuting hundreds of activists, human rights defenders, protesters, and journalists for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly, association and expression, notably on social media, leading to a steady erosion of human rights in the country.