

Recent human rights developments in Algeria

- **Misuse of counterterrorism measures to suppress peaceful dissent**

Between May and August 2021, Algerian authorities have enforced a near-total closure of public space through mass arrests and unlawful use of force against protesters, human rights defenders, and journalists. Many have since been arrested and prosecuted under broadly worded terrorism charges. At least 59 individuals are currently being arbitrarily prosecuted for terrorism-related charges under Article 87bis of the Penal Code defining terrorism, which was amended in June 2021 to further expand this definition. At least 44 of them remain in pretrial detention indefinitely, including Kamira Nait Sid, women and Amazigh rights defender, arrested on 25 August 2021; Slimane Bouhafs, refugee and Christian Amazigh activist, abducted and forcibly returned from Tunis on 25 August 2021; and human rights lawyer Abderraouf Arslane, arrested on 26 May 2021. In a communication dated 27 December 2021, five United Nations Special Procedures warned that Penal Code Article 87bis “[undermined] the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and also [imposed] disproportionate penalties for acts that should not be addressed by counter-terrorism legislation”.

- **Unprecedented legal action against civil and political organisations**

Furthermore, unprecedented legal actions initiated against civil society organisations and political parties - notably members of the Pact for a Democratic Alternative (PAD) - indicate the authorities' determination to tighten their crackdown on any independent and organised activism and suppress the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

On 20 January 2022, the State Council temporarily suspended the activities of the Socialist Workers' Party (PST) and closed its premises for “illegal activity”. On the same day, the State Council dismissed a similar request from the Ministry of Interior to suspend the Union for Change and Progress (UCP); however, it is yet to rule on a request for the dissolution of the UCP. On 5 January, the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) received a warning from the Ministry of Interior to stop hosting meetings in its offices without authorisation and threatened the party with legal action. The warning referred to a meeting the RCD hosted on 24 December 2021 to launch a “popular front against the repression”. At least nine members of the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) have either been sentenced to prison, placed under judicial supervision or in pretrial detention since September 2021. On 13 October 2021, the administrative court of Algiers also dissolved Rally Youth Actions (Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse – RAJ), a prominent youth and human rights organisation, on the basis that its activities allegedly contradicted its statutes. At least eleven members of RAJ have already been prosecuted since 2019.

Civil and political activists have also been particularly targeted. Nine members of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH) are prosecuted in relation to their activism, three of them have been in pre-trial detention for several months. On 13 January, Nasreddine Hamitouche and Hichem Khiaat, the Youth Gathering for Algeria (Rassemblement des Jeunes pour l'Algérie - RJPA), were placed under judicial control. On 9 January 2022, Fethi Ghares, national coordinator of the Democratic and Social Movement (MDS) was sentenced to two

years in prison for criticising the authorities online and during a meeting. On 14 November 2021, Nacer Meghnine, President of youth organisation SOS Culture Bab el Oued, was sentenced to one year in prison for “distributing and possessing publications to undermine national unity” and “inciting an unarmed gathering”.

- **Continued arbitrary arrests and sentencing based on broadly-worded charges**

In parallel to these two notable developments, the arbitrary arrests and sentencing of peaceful activists, rights defenders and journalists have continued unabated, using vague, broadly-worded charges such as “undermining national unity”, “offence to public bodies” or “incitement to an unarmed gathering”. According to trusted sources , at least 27 peaceful activists, demonstrators and journalists were sentenced to prison in January 2022. These include for example activist Mustapha Guira, sentenced to three years in prison on 23 January while he was on pretrial detention since 29 avril 2021 in another terrorist case; activist Bouziza Boumediene, sentenced to three years in prison on 30 January, and journalist and blogger Merzoug Touati, sentenced to one year in prison on 1 January. Among the 33 activists and journalists arrested in January 2022 is journalist Abdelkrim Zeghileche, arrested for terrorism-related charges on 24 January, as well as workers' rights defender Dalila Touat, arrested again on 31 January 2022. Both were already subjected to judicial harassment.