

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 28/02/96

UA 167/96

Prisoner of conscience

4 July 1996

ALGERIA Chawki LAAMARI, journalist

Chawki Laamari, a journalist with the daily newspaper *La Tribune* was arrested on 4 July 1996 for a drawing of the Algerian flag published in *La Tribune*. He was charged under Article 160 bis of the Algerian Penal Code, which provides for five to 10 years' imprisonment for anyone convicted of "publicly and deliberately destroying, mutilating or profaning the national emblem". He is now detained in Serkadji Prison in Algiers.

The director and editor of the newspaper were also interrogated by the judge and placed under judicial control; they have to report to the authorities twice a week. The newspaper has been suspended indefinitely.

Amnesty International considers Chawki Laamari to be a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the past four years increasing restrictions have been imposed on the media in Algeria, resulting in the arrest and detention of journalists and repeated suspensions of newspapers; most of those detained have been accused of breaching the increasingly restrictive rules imposed on security information. In most cases the journalists detained were promptly released and given fines or suspended prison terms. However, one journalist accused of publishing unauthorized information considered to be security-related was sentenced to three years imprisonment in 1995 and is currently in prison.

In the past three years journalists have also been increasingly targeted by armed opposition groups who define themselves as "Islamic groups"; since May 1993 more than 50 journalists have been killed in attacks believed to have been carried out by such groups. As well as living in constant fear of attack by these armed groups, Algerian journalists are now more and more concerned about the increasing restrictions and censorship imposed on their work by the authorities.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French/Arabic/English or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest and detention of journalist Chawki Laamari, and calling for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience;
- urging the authorities to release any other journalists imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their views in their writings or drawings.

APPEALS TO:

**M. Liamine ZEROUAL
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
El Mouradia
Alger
Algérie
Faxes: +213 2 60 96 18
Telegrams: President Zeroual, Alger, Algeria
Salutation: Excellence / Your Excellency**

M. Mustafa BENMANSOUR
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur
18 rue Docteur Saâdane
Alger
Algérie
Faxes: +213 2 736106
Telegrams: Ministre de l'Interieur, Alger, Algeria
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

M. Mohamed ADAMI
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
8 Place Bir Hakem
El-Biar, Alger
Algérie
Faxes: +213 2 922560, 925557, 796557
Telegrams: Ministre de la Justice, Alger, Algeria
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

M. Kamel REZZAG-BARA
President
Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)
Palais du Peuple
1 Av. Franklin Roosevelt
Alger
Algerie
Fax.: +213 2 601042

and to diplomatic representatives of ALGERIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 August 1996.