Algerian prosecutors should drop all charges against six activists facing prison sentences on charges stemming from their support of an embattled human rights lawyer, Amnesty International said today. The First Instance Tribunal in the central Algerian city of Ghardaia is expected to issue a verdict in their trial tomorrow.

Fethi Ghares, a candidate in the 2019 presidential election for Socialist Democratic Movement (MDS) party; MDS member Hamid Ferhi; Abdelkader Kherba, Kaddour Chouicha and Ahmed Nanseri, all members of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH); and Nadir Dabouz, the nephew of human rights lawyer Salah Dabouz, are being tried on charges of incitement to a gathering of an unarmed nature, insulting a public official, and refusal to abide by a law. Prosecutors have asked the judge to sentence the six defendants to one year in prison and fine them 100,000 Algerian dinars (853 US dollars).

The charges ostensibly stem from their attempt to show support for Salah Dabouz during a hearing in his trial in Ghardaia on 13 July 2016. Police arrested the six men at approximately 9am as they waited for the hearing to begin at a nearby cafe.

Police released the six late that afternoon, and prosecutors only filed the charges against them in February 2017.

“\n\\"The spurious nature of these charges is underscored by the extraordinary delay in the prosecutor’s decision to pursue them,\\" said Heba Morayef, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International. “No one should face imprisonment simply for planning to attend the court hearing of a colleague. These charges must be dropped immediately.”

The UN Human Rights Committee is scheduled to review Algeria’s compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights on 4-5 July. In its submission to the committee on Algeria, Amnesty International called on Algerian authorities to respect its obligations under articles 19 and 21 of the treaty, which guarantee the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly.