

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: MDE 28/2313/2015  
21 August 2015

## **Algerian human rights defender at risk of extradition must be released immediately**

The Italian authorities must not extradite Algerian human rights lawyer Rachid Mesli to Algeria and must release him immediately, Amnesty International said today.

Human rights lawyer Rachid Mesli was arrested around 10am on 19 August 2015 at the Swiss-Italian border between the Swiss canton of Valais and the Italian Aosta Valley as he was about to go on holiday with his wife and teenage son.

The Italian police proceeded to arrest him on the basis of an international arrest warrant issued by the Algerian authorities in April 2002. He was taken to the police station of Aosta and later transferred to the Aosta prison, where he is currently being detained. He has yet to speak to a lawyer.

The Italian authorities are due to approve or reject the extradition request.

Rachid Mesli was charged in absentia by the Algerian authorities with belonging to an “armed terrorist group” operating abroad, after two men arrested in March 2002 were allegedly forced under torture by the Algerian security forces into making statements in which they “confessed” to having links with him and with an armed group.

Rachid Mesli worked as a human rights lawyer during the internal conflict in Algeria. He faced repeated harassment and intimidation from the Algerian authorities on account of his work defending victims of human rights violations by the state.

In 1996, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment in a grossly unfair trial on the vaguely worded charge of “encouraging terrorism”. The use of vaguely worded charges related to “terrorism” has led to the imprisonment of hundreds of Algerians for activities amounting to the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.

Rachid Mesli was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience.

In 2000, a year after his release, Rachid Mesli left Algeria, fearing for his safety and that of his family, and sought refuge in Switzerland. He currently works as Legal Director of the Geneva-based NGO AIKarama, which he founded in 2005.

Amnesty International urges the Italian authorities not to extradite Rachid Mesli as he was charged on the basis of “confessions” allegedly obtained under torture, and to release him immediately.

The use of coerced “confessions” as evidence in judicial proceeding violates the prohibition of torture as well as the right to a fair trial, as spelled out in Article 15 of the Convention against Torture and Article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Italy, and Algeria, are both state parties.

Public document

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For more information please call Amnesty International’s press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: [press@amnesty.org](mailto:press@amnesty.org) International Secretariat, 1, Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)