

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST ARRESTED FOR COVERING A PROTEST

On 18 April, the Algerian authorities arrested journalist Rabah Kareche shortly after he published an article in *Liberté* newspaper, covering a protest staged by the Tuareg population of the Tamanrasset area, in southern Algeria, contesting the recent transfer of parts of their province into a newly established province. He is detained in a prison in Tamanrasset awaiting trial and could face up to 23 years in prison if convicted. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of the Republic of Algeria Abdelmagid Tebboune

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Your Excellency,

*I am writing to raise concern about the recent arrest and detention of Algerian journalist **Rabah Kareche**, a correspondent of the *Liberté* newspaper in Tamanrasset in southern Algeria. The Algerian security forces summoned him on 18 April and questioned him at length about an [article](#) that he published on the same day. The article in question covers a protest organized by the Touareg population of Tamanrasset to contest a recent administrative territorial demarcation and demand the authorities to abolish a new decree that sets new territorial boundaries that allows the transfer of a portion of Tamanrasset, rich in natural resources, into newly created wilayas (provinces).*

A prosecutor at the first instance court of Tamanrasset charged Rabah Kareche on 19 April with the offences of "spreading fake news or information which threatens security or public order" and "harming the national security or national unity" under Penal Code articles 196 bis and 79 respectively as well as "creating or supervising an electronic site to publish information likely to cause discrimination and hatred in society" under article 34 of the newly adopted Law on Preventing and Combating Discrimination and Hate Speech. An investigative judge at the same tribunal ordered Rabah Kareche's pre-trial detention that same day in the Tamanrasset prison. His lawyers submitted a request for provisional release, but the court rejected it on 27 April. Rabah Kareche will be in prison until his trial, which has not been scheduled yet.

This is not the first time that Rabah Kareche has been targeted for his journalistic work. During the two months leading to this arrest, he was subjected to harassment and intimidation by the security forces who summoned him at least three times in the aftermath of publishing an article about sub-Saharan migrants in Algeria. Rabah Kareche alleged that the police pressured him to reveal his sources which he refused.

In light of the above, I urge you to immediately drop all the baseless charges against Rabah Kareche, and immediately and unconditionally release him from detention as he is detained solely for peacefully exercising his human rights and carrying out his job as a journalist. I also call on you to ensure that authorities stop harassing and intimidating journalists in Algeria and that authorities respect, protect, promote and fulfil people's right to freedom of expression and media freedom in line with international human rights standards, including through amending provisions of laws that are used to restrict freedom of expression.

Yours Sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Rabah Kareche has been a correspondent for Liberté newspaper in Tamanrasset for almost a decade. His publications in Liberté cover a range of issues including social justice, governance, corruption, and migration. His coverage of events in Algeria's most southern region and military zone brought attention to the struggle of the Tuareg populations who regularly protest against their economic and social marginalization without enough media attention. Rabah Kareche exposed this issue including through [interviewing](#) a tribal leader of the district of Tazrouk, in the province of Tamanrasset, who accused the authorities of not having taken into account a report on the historical territorial limits of the province when deciding to establish new territorial division in the region.

Rabah Kareche's detention is an example of the Algerian authorities' renewed crackdown on human rights, particularly the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and media freedom in the country. In February 2021, President Tebboune pardoned dozens of activists who had spent months in prison for nothing other than peacefully participating in the popular Hirak protest movement- which demands political change in Algeria- . Among those released was journalist Khaled Drareni who had spent almost a year behind bars simply for covering the Hirak protests. Since the Hirak protests resumed in February 2021 after months of rupture, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Algerian authorities resumed repressive tactics by targeting journalists, human rights defenders, activists, and protesters through arbitrary arrests and various other means that limit their rights to peaceful expression and assembly. According to the National Committee for the liberation of detainees, a local watchdog group, at least 63 activists are currently in detention in Algeria, with 48 arrested since February 2021.

Algerian legislation is rife with repressive provisions that enable the prosecution of journalists, bloggers and activists. These laws are often vaguely worded and overly broad, allowing them to be applied arbitrarily against people criticizing the authorities. In a [report](#) published on 22 February 2021, Amnesty International found that courts relied on at least 20 such articles, with the most commonly used being "harming national unity", "harming national interest", "demoralizing the army", "incitement to unarmed gathering", "offending public officials", "offending the President" or "harming Islam", under Penal Code Articles 79, 96, 74, 75, 100, 144, 144 bis, and 144 bis 1 respectively. The authorities used the COVID-19 pandemic as excuse to pass new laws which further curtail the rights to freedom of expression, online and offline, and peaceful assembly, by adding article 196 bis to the Penal Code to punish the spread of "fake news".

As a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)- which in its Article 19 guarantees everyone's right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers and through any media- Algeria is obligated to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the right to freedom of expression and media freedom.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and French.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 29 JUNE 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Rabah Kareche (He/ his)