

URGENT ACTION

SENTENCED TO 5 YEARS IN PRISON FOR FACEBOOK POSTS

Algerian activist Slimane Bouhafs started to serve a five-year prison term after a court in Sétif, eastern Algeria, charged him with insulting Islam and Prophet Muhammad for posts he made on Facebook. A date for his appeal hearing has yet to be set.

Gendarmerie officers arrested **Slimane Bouhafs** in the *wilaya* (province) of Sétif, eastern Algeria, on the morning of 31 July. They informed him that he was being charged with insulting Islam and Prophet Muhammad. In the early afternoon, they brought him to the gendarmerie in the Bousselam commune, in the *wilaya* of Sétif, as they continued to interrogate him and proceeded to search his house. When the Public Prosecutor at the Court of Sétif declined to see him, gendarmerie officers brought him before the Public Prosecutor at the Court of Beni Ourtilane late at night. He had no access to a lawyer throughout his pre-trial detention, interrogation and trial. On 7 August, the court sentenced him to a five-year prison term and a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars (approximately US\$900) for “offending the Prophet” and “denigrating the creed and precepts of Islam” under Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code, in connection with posts that he had made on Facebook.

Following his arrest on 31 July, Slimane Bouhafs went on hunger strike for several days to protest against his detention at Bel Air prison in Sétif. His family, who was allowed to visit him on 17 August, told Amnesty International that they were deeply concerned for his health, as he has lost a lot of weight and suffers from gout, which requires him to follow a strict diet that is not available in prison. He is currently being held in a cell close to the prison infirmary.

Algeria’s Constitution, amended in February 2016, guarantees freedom of religion but makes Islam the state religion. Vaguely-worded provisions in both the Penal Code and Ordinance 06-03 regulating religious faiths other than Islam, a law passed in 2006, have been used to prosecute individuals for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, religion and belief.

Please write immediately in Arabic, French or your own language:

- Urging the Algerian authorities to release Slimane Bouhafs immediately and unconditionally, as his conviction stems solely from the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure that, while detained, he has ongoing access to a qualified health professional and adequate medical care, including by ensuring his dietary requirements are met;
- Urging them to amend legislation that criminalizes the rights to freedom of expression and religion, including Article 144 bis 2 of the Penal Code.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 SEPTEMBER 2016 TO:

President
Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Presidency of the Republic
El Mouradia, Algiers
Algeria
Fax: +213 21 6915 95 / +213 21 6096 18
Email: president@el-mouradia.dz
Salutation: Your Excellency

Justice Minister
Tayeb Louh
Ministry of Justice
8 Place Bir Hakem
16030 El Biar, Algiers
Algeria
Fax: +213 21 9217 01
Email: contact@mjustice.dz
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:
President, National human rights institution
M. Mustapha Farouk Ksentini
Commission nationale consultative de promotion et de protection des droits de l’Homme
Palais du Peuple, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt,
Algiers, Algeria
Fax: +213 21 2399 58
Email: contact@cncppdh-algerie.org

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Slimane Bouhafis, 49, is a Christian convert and chair of the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians in Algeria. He is also a supporter of the Movement for Self-Determination of Kabylia (MAK). He had reported receiving threatening phone calls in the week leading up to his arrest on 31 July.

Although Article 42 of the Algerian Constitution states that “freedom of creed and opinion is inviolable”, individuals have been prosecuted in Algeria under Article 144 bis 2 of the Penal Code as a result of their conversion to Christianity, and for eating during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. Under Ordinance 06-03 regulating religious faiths other than Islam, Christians, including converts, have also faced judicial proceedings for “practicing religious rites without authorization”.

Amnesty International opposes blasphemy laws, which violate the rights to freedom of expression, conscience and religion, equality before the law and freedom from discrimination.

See also “*Algeria: key human rights concerns ahead of presidential elections*” (Index: MDE 28/004/2014) issued on 14 April 2014: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE28/004/2014/en/

Name: Slimane Bouhafis

Gender m/f: m

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