

AI Index: PRE 01/154/2013
26 March 2013

Travel restrictions stop Algerian activists from attending World Social Forum

The Algerian authorities have prevented a delegation of 96 trade unionists and civil society activists from crossing the border into Tunisia to attend the World Social Forum this week, violating their right to freedom of movement, Amnesty International said today.

The 96 have not been given any reason for the travel ban. Border police near the north-eastern city of Annaba told the delegates today that they were on a list of people banned from leaving Algeria because of “unrest”.

“Placing travel restrictions on civil society activists is a blatant attempt to prevent them from meeting and discussing with fellow groups from all over the world, and in so doing to isolate them,” said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Ironically, such practices are reminiscent of the travel restrictions placed on Tunisian human rights activists under the Ben Ali era. While Tunisia has experiencing tremendous change and is hosting the 13th World Social Forum in Tunis, the Algerian authorities continue to rely on old repressive tactics and seem to not have learnt the lessons of the recent uprisings in the region.”

The World Social Forum is a global meeting of activists and civil society organizations. Some 50,000 activists are expected to attend the event which runs from 26 March to 30 March and addresses social, economic and human rights issues.

The delegation of 96 people, travelling in two buses, has been stopped from crossing the Algerian border with Tunisia three times at different border posts since 3am yesterday morning.

Amnesty International has urged the Algerian authorities to immediately lift all the restrictions put on the activists and to allow them to attend the World Social Forum and to ensure they will not face any reprisals or form of intimidation.

Such restrictions on activists are in breach of Algeria’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and contravene the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders – the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms -, which protects their rights to seek the protection and realization of human rights at the national and international levels, to conduct human rights work individually and in association with others,

The delegation planning to attend the World Social Forum is composed of members of the National Autonomous Union of Public Administration Personnel SNAPAP (Syndicat national autonome des personnels de l’administration publique); the human rights groups Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights LADDH (Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l’Homme); SOS-Disparus,

composed of relatives of victims of enforced disappearances in Algeria; and a group campaigning on behalf of unemployed people the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed CNDDC (Comité national de défense des droits des chômeurs).

Members of these groups have been repeatedly harassed by the Algerian authorities, who continue to restrict freedom of assembly and association in law and practice, as protests over poverty, unemployment and corruption have increased in the country during the past two years.