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## **Algeria: Release blogger held for sharing photos on Facebook**

The Algerian authorities must immediately release a blogger detained on terrorism and defamation charges after he shared photos and caricatures of the President and the Prime Minister on his Facebook account, Amnesty International said.

The lawyer of 24-year-old blogger Abdelghani Aloui filed, on 13 October, a request for his release pending trial. A decision is expected this week.

“The Algerian authorities appear to be trying to stifle criticism at a time of uncertainty ahead of presidential elections due next year. Abdelghani Aloui must be immediately released and all charges against him dropped,” said Philip Luther, Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International.

“The authorities are vastly overreacting to what is nothing more than legitimate expression. Using terrorism-related charges to detain someone for sharing images on social media sites sets a very dangerous precedent.”

Abdelghani Aloui was arrested on 15 September and held in pre-arraignment detention for 10 days under Algerian criminal procedures, which allow terrorism suspects to be held for up to 12 days before seeing a magistrate.

He was then charged with insulting the President and public institutions, and with “praising terrorism”, apparently in relation to a scarf the security forces found in his home bearing the Islamic creed “La ilah illa Allah” (there is no god but God).

If convicted of “praising terrorism”, he faces up to 10 years’ imprisonment. This offence in Algeria’s Penal Code is worded so broadly that it can include peaceful criticism of the authorities.

He also faces a fine of up to 500,000 dinars (US\$6,000) for insulting the President.

Changes to the Penal Code in 2011 significantly increased the level of fines in cases related to defamation. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression described the change as having “a chilling effect on the right to freedom of expression”.

“The Algerian authorities must reform laws that criminalize defamation and end the use of anti-terrorism legislation to restrict peaceful criticism of public officials,” said Philip Luther.

Abdelghani Aloui is currently held in Serkadji prison in Algiers, in the same wing as terrorism suspects. The prison is more than 500km away from his home town, Tlemcen.

Abdelghani’s detention is the second detention of a blogger in a year.

In July 2012, Saber Saidi was arrested, reportedly by the Department of Intelligence and Security, for posting videos relating to the uprisings in the Middle East. He too was charged with “praising terrorism” and kept in preventive detention for nine months until his release in April 2013.