

URGENT ACTION

POLITICAL LEADER IMPRISONED FOR SPEECH

On 24 March 2020, leader of the opposition Algerian political party, Union Démocratique et Sociale (UDS), Karim Tabbou was sentenced to one year in prison and a fine of 50,000 Algerian dinars (around 405 USD) for trumped up charges of “incitement to violence” and “harming national security” in relation to a speech he gave, in a video published on the political party’s Facebook page, where he peacefully criticized the role of the army in politics. Tabbou has been held in prolonged solitary confinement since his arrest in September 2019.

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

*Minister of Justice Belkacem Zeghamati
8 Place Bir Hakem
Alger*

Your Excellency,

On 24 March 2020, an appeal court sentenced Karim Tabbou to one year in prison and a fine of 50 000 Algerian dinars (around 405 USD) for trumped-up charges of "harming national security" and "incitement to violence" in relation to a video published on his political party's Facebook page, in which he peacefully criticized the role of the army in politics. Prior to this appeal, on 11 March 2020, a lower court had sentenced him to one-year imprisonment, of which six months were suspended, meaning he was due to be released on 26 March 2020, since he had already served six months. However, on 24 March 2020, two days before his scheduled release date, Karim was transferred from Kolea prison to the appeal court without informing his family or lawyers. His lawyers were notified by a colleague who happened to be at the courtroom at the time and were not able to attend the hearing. Karim was also unable to attend since he had collapsed at the court room due to a spike in blood pressure and was taken to the courtroom's infirmary. In total disregard of these conditions, the judges pronounced a verdict in absentia and in the absence of his lawyers in a flagrant violation of fair trial principles. Karim Tabbou has been in solitary confinement for six months since his arrest on 12 September 2019. He is only allowed a one-hour break per day without contact with other prisoners. This confinement continues to date despite his alarming health condition that solicited a public statement from a group of Algerian doctors warning about the dangers of keeping him in prison. According to his lawyers who visited him on 25 March 2020 immediately after the appeal verdict, he was showing signs of weak health in prison including a partial facial paralysis.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Karim Tabbou and quash his conviction as he is a prisoner of conscience. Pending his release, I call on you to ensure he has access to adequate health care. I finally call on you to investigate the conditions of his arrest and detention and release all other prisoners of conscience in Algeria.

Sincerely

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 11 March 2020, the Ruisseau court in Algiers issued a verdict in first instance sentencing Karim Tabbou to 12 months in prison, of which 6 months were suspended. He was due to be released on 26 March 2020 having already served the 6 months in prison. The lawyers and prosecutor appealed the court's decision, and on 24 March 2020, Karim was brought before the judge of the Ruisseau court, for the appeal session in the absence of his defence team. He fainted before his lawyers arrived. The judge decided to issue a verdict in his absence of a one-year prison sentence and a fine of 50 000 dinars.

In July 2013, the Algerian authorities refused to accord Karim Tabbou's opposition party legal status. Tabbou has been an active figure in Hirak movement that started in Algeria a year ago in February 2019. His activism and political engagement made him a target of the authorities who arrested him on 12 September 2019. He was accused of "harming the army's moral" for a public speech he made in Algeria in May 2019. He was then released provisionally on 25 September 2019 and arrested again the next day on 26 September.

Karim Tabbou is not the only political detainee in Algeria. Many other individuals suffer the same fate for expressing opinions or participating in protests, such as journalist Khaled Drareni and social civil activist Abdelouahab Fersaoui, currently held in pre-trial detention for speech.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 15 May 2020.

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Karim Tabbou (He/ His)