

# URGENT ACTION

## TORTURED WHISTLEBLOWER SENTENCED TO LIFE

Mohamed Benhlima, a former military officer, whistleblower and anti-corruption activist who was forcibly returned from Spain on 24 March 2022, is serving a life sentence in the Blida military prison stemming from the exercise of his rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. He has complained to the court of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, prolonged solitary confinement and beatings at least six times since May 2022, most recently on 8 December 2024, but the Algerian authorities have not announced an investigation. Authorities must quash his convictions and sentences, drop any further charges stemming from his exercise of human rights and release him immediately.

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

*President of the Republic of Algeria*

*Abdelmadjid Tebboune*

*Presidence de la Republique*

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*Your Excellency,*

*I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention and judicial harassment of whistleblower, activist and former military official Mohamed Benhlima, since his forced return from Spain in March 2022. His claims that he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence, while held at the Blida military prison in 2022, have not been investigated despite multiple complaints and statements in court, most recently made at Dar El Beïda Criminal Tribunal at the Court of Algiers on 8 December 2024.*

*Civil and military judicial courts have convicted Mohamed Benhlima at least four separate cases on charges stemming solely from his exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. He was convicted for activities protected under international human rights law, including online publications exposing alleged corruption within the Algerian military and criticising the government, his participation in and his support for the "Hirak" pro-democracy protest movement and communications online with other activists as well as members or alleged members of Rachad – a political opposition group labelled as "terrorist" by the Algerian authorities based on a process of designation that does not conform to international human rights standards. On 23 January 2025, upon retrial, the Blida Military Appeals Court in Algiers sentenced him to a 10-year prison term after convicting him of a broadly defined charge of disclosing confidential information relating to national defence to a foreign entity. He was initially convicted and sentenced to death in his absence in this case in 2021. In two separate cases, on 28 August 2024, the Blida Military Appeals Court upheld Mohamed Benhlima's life sentence and another five-year prison term, also for charges related to desertion and espionage. Mohamed Benhlima is awaiting his appeal trial in yet another case in which he was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment on 12 July 2023 for multiple charges including "membership and participation in a terrorist group", "undermining national unity" and "inciting an unarmed gathering", using statements extracted under torture as "evidence". He faces dozens of further criminal investigations in relation to the exercise of his human rights.*

*Mohamed Benhlima is held in the Blida military prison, where prison authorities have on occasion denied him family visits without providing a reason or only allowed him to see them for 10 minutes in the presence of guards.*

***I urge you to release Mohamed Benhlima, to quash his convictions and sentences and to drop all the charges against him related to his exercise of his rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is held in conditions meeting international standards and to launch an immediate, impartial, effective and independent investigation into his complaints of torture and other ill-treatment. Finally, I urge you to grant him access to his family and lawyers and to refrain from any act of intimidation against them.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mohamed Benhlima exposed alleged corruption in the Algerian military on his [YouTube](#) channel and Facebook page between 2019 and 2022. He also participated in the Algerian Hirak protest movement that erupted in February 2019, and fled to Spain, fearing prosecution, in September 2019. Since his forced return from Spain, Algerian authorities have initiated dozens of prosecutions against him in civilian and military courts.

On 24 March 2022, the Spanish authorities issued refused his asylum and [forcibly returned him](#) to Algeria in blatant violation of their obligations on non-refoulement within hours, without notifying his lawyers of the order of expulsion. The decisions were made despite concerns over risks of arbitrary detention and torture or other ill-treatment in Algeria, raised by his lawyers and several human rights organizations including Amnesty International, which also [called on the authorities not to deport him](#). The Spanish authorities also ignored an assessment provided by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) on 21 March 2022 which found him eligible for international protection and found grounds to believe that the risk of torture was "foreseeable, personal, present and real".

Mohamed Benhlima was informed on 8 May 2022 that the Blida Military Court had sentenced him to death in absentia in 2021 for an overly broad charge of disclosing confidential information relating to national defence to a foreign entity under Article 63 para 2 of the Penal Code. Upon his forced return to Algeria, he appealed and secured a retrial. On 30 April 2024, the Blida Military Court sentenced him to 10 years of prison, upheld by the Blida Military Appeals Court on 23 January 2025. In another case, on 12 July 2023, the First Instance Tribunal of Dar El Beïda in Algiers sentenced him to seven years in prison on charges including "membership and participation in a terrorist group" (Article 87 bis 3 of the Penal Code), for alleged association with Rachad, and "undermining national unity", "inciting an unarmed gathering", "offending public bodies", and "publishing fake news likely to harm public security and public order", respectively under Articles 79, 100, 146 and 196 bis of the Penal Code. These charges stem from critical remarks he made online about government officials and the army and his participation in Hirak protests. He was convicted based on his forced "confessions", which he later retracted in court saying they were extracted under torture. He is awaiting an appeal in this case. In another case, on 28 August 2024, the Blida Military Appeals Court upheld his conviction to a life sentence on appeal for disclosing confidential information to a foreign entity (Article 63 of the Penal Code para 1), based on online publications about army corruption. The activist submitted an appeal before the Court of Cassation. On 28 August 2024, the Blida Military Appeals Court also sentenced him to five years in prison on appeal for desertion (Article 259 and 262 of the Code of Military Justice) for his departure to Spain.

On 8 December 2024, Mohamed Benhlima declared in front of the Dar El Beïda Criminal Tribunal at the Court of Algiers: "[military agents] tortured, harassed and raped me" while in detention in the Blida military prison in 2022. Mohamed Benhlima raised allegations of torture to a judge in court at least six times between May 2022 and December 2024 and has disclosed information to his family and lawyers about torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence to which he was subjected both at the military prison and the S'hawla intelligence centre in Algiers, including beatings and pouring freezing cold water on him after stripping him naked. Following his forced return from Spain, authorities forcibly disappeared Mohamed Benhlima until he appeared in court on 5 April 2022. Authorities held him in solitary confinement between April and June 2022, during which the activist was allowed to exit his cell once a day for 10 minutes, without contact with other prisoners, and he was refused access to books or other reading material. The Algerian authorities never announced any investigation into his claims despite his family formally requesting an investigation in a letter to the Algerian authorities on 25 June 2022, submitting a complaint to an Algiers public prosecutor in September 2022 and again writing to the public prosecutor in 2023 and 2024. Mohamed Benhlima's family has expressed fear for his life in December 2022 after he disclosed to them that he was considering suicide. Before his forced return, the activist had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), severe depression and anxiety.

Mohamed Benhlima's rights to a fair trial were violated including his right not to self-incriminate and to presumption of innocence. In March 2022, he appeared in videos broadcasted by the Algerian national broadcasting services in which he "confessed" to conspiracy against the state fomented by Rachad, Morocco and Israel.

Amnesty International learned from informed sources that Mohamed Benhlima's family and lawyers have been subjected to intimidation. On 28 August 2024, military agents arrested Mohamed Benhlima's brother ahead of a prison visit and held him for a day, alleging that he took a picture of the military prison.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic and French.

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 21 September 2025.**

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

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Mohamed Benhlima (he/his/him).

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde28/6128/2022/en/>.

## **ADDITIONAL TARGETS**

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