

URGENT ACTION

ONE YEAR IN PRISON FOR DENOUNCING CORRUPTION

An Algerian court sentenced journalist Hassan Bouras to a year in prison and fines for a video denouncing corruption of local officials in the city of El Bayadh. He is a prisoner of conscience.

On 28 November, the Court of First Instance in the city of El Bayadh, western Algeria, convicted journalist **Hassan Bouras** for a video interview of local residents stating that high-ranking judicial and security officials in the town took bribes and imprisoned innocent people on trumped up charges. The court convicted the journalist of complicity in offending a judicial officer, law enforcement officers, and a public body (Articles 144 and 146 of the Penal Code). It also convicted him of unlawfully practising a profession regulated by law (Article 243) for recording the video interview, which was broadcast on Al Magharibia, a private satellite television channel with a substantial audience in the country. Hassan Bouras was sentenced to one year in prison and fines, and has appealed the conviction. The court also convicted the three interviewees of offending a judicial officer, law enforcement officers and a public body, and sentenced them to one year in prison and fines.

Hassan Bouras is now held in El Bayadh Prison where he is said to suffer from rheumatism that developed during an earlier period in detention in a separate case a year ago. Authorities were investigating him for offending a public body (Article 146 of the Penal Code) and “inciting citizens or inhabitants to take up arms against the authority of the state or against each other” (Article 77), a charge that could incur the death penalty, in relation to posts he had made on Facebook. He was released on 18 January 2016 after over three month pre-trial detention.

Aside from his work as a journalist, Hassan Bouras is a human rights defender and leading member of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) in El Bayadh. He is also a founding member of the Refusal Front, a coalition advocating political change in the country.

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

- Calling on the Algerian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Hassan Bouras, as he is held solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that he has access to a qualified health professional who can provide healthcare in compliance with medical ethics, including the principles of confidentiality, autonomy and informed consent;
- Urging them to amend Penal Code articles that punish peaceful free expression with prison terms in line with Algeria’s Constitution and obligations under international human rights law.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JANUARY 2017 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
 Twitter: @presidentbout

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
 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. HIS EXCELLENCY Mr Amar Abba, People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, 3 Riding House Street W1W 7DR, 020 7229 7077, Fax 020 7229 7076, info@algerianembassy.org.uk

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

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Article 50 of Algeria's Constitution, introduced during the most recent amendment in February 2016, guarantees media freedoms and provides that press offences cannot be punished by deprivation of liberty. However, national legislation has yet to be brought in line with the Constitution and Algeria's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Algeria's 2012 Information Code is free from prison sentences for defamation offenses, it features prohibitively heavy fines. Meanwhile, journalists and ordinary citizens alike are prosecuted under the Penal Code and sentenced to prison terms for peacefully expressing their opinions or disseminating information. Several Penal Code provisions criminalize the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and punish it with imprisonment or dissuasively high fines.

See also "Algeria: Halt repression of fracking and unemployment protesters", (Index: MDE 28/2122/2015) issued on 27 July 2015: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde28/2122/2015/en/>

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