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First UA: 18/23 Index: MDE 28/6455/2023 Algeria of February 20, 2023

## **ALGERIA**

### **JAILED BROTHER OF ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE**

On 16 February 2023, Algerian father of four and shop owner, Abderrahmane Zitout, started a hunger strike for the third time since his imprisonment, to protest his prolonged, pre-trial detention which now exceeds 324 days. He has been languishing in arbitrary detention in El Harrach prison since April 5, 2022, on fabricated charges in a case related to his brother's political activism and membership of political opposition group, Rachad, which the Algerian authorities have labelled as a terrorist group. His health has seriously deteriorated since his imprisonment, and he was denied medical care until his hospitalization in August 2022 following a 20-day hunger strike. The authorities must drop the unfounded charges against Abderrahmane Zitout and immediately and unconditionally release him.

#### **Write to the president of Algeria urging him to:**

- Immediately drop all baseless charges against Abderrahmane Zitout release him promptly and unconditionally.
- Grant him access to medical care so that he can be treated for his ongoing health issues.

#### **Write to:**

President of the Republic of Algeria  
Abdelmajid Tebboune  
Presidence de la republique  
Place Mohammed Seddik Benyahya, El Mouradia,  
Alger 16000 Algeria  
Email: [President@el-mouradia.dz](mailto:President@el-mouradia.dz)  
Salutation: *Your Excellency*

#### **And copy:**

His Excellency Nouredine BARDAD DAIDJ  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
500 Wilbrod Street  
Ottawa, ON K1N 6N2  
Tel: (613) 789-8505; -0282  
Email: [info@embassyalgeria.ca](mailto:info@embassyalgeria.ca)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Abderrahmane Zitout, 40, owns a small clothes shop in Laghouat, a city in northern Algeria around 400km from Algiers, where he lives with his wife and four young children.

On March 30, 2022, police raided his house and shop and put him in incommunicado detention, where they interrogated him for long hours over five days about his relationship with his brother. His brother, Mohamed Larbi Zitout, is an ex- diplomat and founding member of Rachad, a political movement which the Algerian authorities labelled as a terrorist group in February 2022. Mohamed Larbi Zitout is also one of the founding members of human rights organizations Alkarama and Justitia Universalis (now closed).

On April 5, 2022, a judge at Sidi M'hamed court in Algiers ordered Abderrahmane Zitout's pretrial detention. On April 17, the prosecutor charged Abderrahmane Zitout on four counts under the penal code; he remains held in pretrial detention. He is not permitted to call his family or lawyers on the phone. He is permitted family visits once every 15 days, for 15 minutes, and his lawyers are permitted to visit him. No date has been set for his hearing.

Algerian authorities have used the labelling of Rachad as a terrorist group to prosecute many of the group's members under terrorism-related offences, including under Article 87bis, which carries the death penalty and vaguely defines terrorism as any act "against state security, the integrity of the territory, the stability and normal functioning of state institutions." In March 2022, Spanish authorities deported Algerian activist and whistle-blower Mohamed Benhlima for his alleged association with Rachad. In September 2021, a judge in Algiers interrogated Hassan Bouras for his alleged links with Rachad.

According to his lawyers' transcripts of the hearings, reviewed by Amnesty International, the authorities used conversations that Abderrahmane Zitout shared on Facebook Messenger and forced confessions made by former military officer turned whistle-blower Mohamed Benhlima which said that Mohamed Larbi had sent money to Abderrahmane Zitout to open a shop in Algeria, as evidence for his prosecution under terrorism related charges. Since July 2022, Abderrahmane Zitout's mother, sisters, and nephews have been persecuted and frequently summoned to the police station, with interrogations focusing on their family relationship with Mohamed Larbi Zitout.

**Please take action at your earliest convenience!**