Algeria | 10-year prison sentence for unionist and human rights defender Ali Al-Omari, with serious concerns regarding fair trial guarantees

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HuMENA condemns the continued detention of human rights and union activist Ali Al-Omari, and expresses deep concern over the 10-year prison sentence issued against him by the Criminal Court of Appeal in Oum El Bouaghi on February 1, 2026, after an initial 15-year sentence. This reduction does not address serious concerns related to fair trial guarantees and the violations accompanying his arrest, investigation, and judicial follow-up.

Ali Al-Omari is a public sector employee and union activist, founder and head of the Independent National Union of Culture and Arts Sector Employees (affiliated with the Confederation of Trade Unions of Productive Forces). Information received by Humena from his circle indicates that he faced repeated harassment due to his union activity and attempts to organize the sector.

On March 19, 2025, Ali Al-Omari was arrested at his workplace in Oum El Bouaghi. According to statements from his defense team and family, no judicial document explaining its legal basis of the arrest was presented at the time, and his family and lawyer were unable to locate his place of detention for several days, raising serious concerns that he may have been subjected to enforced disappearance. The defense team and sources close to Ali informed Humena that he was subjected during detention to harsh and humiliating treatment, including repeated assaults and forced stripping during interrogations, as well as pressure to extract confessions, which may amount to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.

On March 27, 2025, after his police detention ended, he was brought before the public prosecutor who decided to transfer his case to an investigating judge and opened an investigation based on criminal articles related to terrorism and dissemination of “secret” information. According to the defense, a decision was issued to place him in pre-trial detention without effective notification enabling counsel to fully exercise the right of defense, raising concerns about respect for due process guarantees.

Article 87 bis of the Algerian Criminal Code raises human rights concerns due to the broad definition of “terrorism” and its potential use against peaceful acts. Since the 2021 amendments, the definition has expanded to include acts linked to “attempting to change the regime by unconstitutional means” and “undermining national unity,” increasing risks of arbitrary prosecutions. The legal framework related to protecting “secret/sensitive” information and documents, including Order No. 21-09 of 2021, also raises concerns about the use of broad definitions to restrict freedom of expression and information exchange, especially when linked to

union activity or peaceful human rights defense.

In his trial, Ali Al-Omari was accused of “glorifying terrorist acts” and “disseminating secret information,” and faced allegations of exchanging correspondence with unionists and activists abroad, although these communications were professional, familial, or related to his union activities. According to the defense’s review, no sufficient evidence was presented to establish the constituent elements of serious crimes in accordance with international standards. Humena stresses that the expanded use of terrorism charges in contexts related to peaceful expression and union work raises serious concerns about politicization.

He was also accused of disclosing sensitive information after sharing an administrative document showing his transfer to a position without duties and inappropriate working conditions following his appointment as a union representative, without legal justification. Information circulating in correspondence/memos addressed to the International Labour Organization indicates that these issues arose within a union framework, reinforcing the link of the case to his union activities.

Algeria is a party to international treaties guaranteeing freedom of association and human rights, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and International Labour Organization conventions related to freedom of association and collective bargaining rights. Ali Al-Omari and all human rights defenders have the right to work in an environment that protects rather than punishes them. This also entails specific obligations under the Anti-Torture Convention to ensure immediate and effective investigation of torture allegations and accountability for perpetrators.

HuMENA condemns these prosecutions and calls on Algerian authorities to:

- Immediately release Ali Al-Omari, or at least grant him provisional release pending the outcome of appeal proceedings, and ensure his right to a fair trial according to international standards.
- Open an independent and effective investigation into allegations of torture and ill-treatment, ensuring no use of statements or “confessions” suspected to be extracted under duress.
- Guarantee the right of defense, including timely notification of procedures, access to lawyers, availability of the case file, public hearings, and fair trial guarantees.
- Stop using vague texts defining terrorism or secrecy to criminalize union work and peaceful expression, and revise related laws in compliance with Algeria’s international obligations.
- Guarantee freedom of union organization and protect human rights defenders from retaliation due to their activities.

HuMENA also calls on international partners and relevant UN mechanisms, including special rapporteurs on torture, human rights defenders, and freedom of peaceful assembly and association, as well as the International Labour Organization, to follow up on the case and seek clarifications from Algerian authorities regarding fair trial guarantees and detainee safety.

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