Algeria | Closure of the office of the “SOS Disappeared” association, affiliated with the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria, constitutes a direct attack on freedom of association and the right to truth

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HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement condemns the decision by the Algerian authorities on 16 March 2026 to close the office of the “SOS Disappeared” association (SOS Disparus) in Algiers, which is affiliated with the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA). HuMENA considers this measure to be not a routine administrative action, but an arbitrary use of legal and administrative tools to target an independent human rights association working on enforced disappearances. It constitutes a direct attack on freedom of association and on the right of victims’ families to organize and demand truth, justice, and redress.

This step is particularly serious given the role the association plays. “SOS Disappeared” is not merely a local association. For years, it has served as a key platform for families of the disappeared in Algeria and an independent space for demanding the truth about the fate of victims, rejecting impunity, and defending the right to justice and reparation. Targeting it therefore goes beyond restricting a single association. It strikes at one of the most important spaces through which families have continued to defend their rights publicly and collectively.

HuMENA believes that invoking the association’s legal status to justify closing its office raises serious concerns about respect for freedom of association in Algeria. The absence of formal registration should not be used as a pretext to exclude independent associations from public space or to shut them down arbitrarily, especially when they operate peacefully in the field of human rights and represent families of victims of enforced disappearance. What occurred cannot be treated as a mere administrative procedure, because its actual effect is to disrupt an independent human rights structure and deprive it of its ability to continue operating, organizing, and communicating.

This closure comes within an ongoing pattern of pressure targeting the association, its members, and its leadership. The association has previously faced restrictions affecting its activities, public presence, and means of operation, including bans on events, limitations on communication, and the targeting of its leaders. This pattern confirms that the closure of the office is not an isolated incident, but part of a continuing approach aimed at limiting the association’s ability to carry out its human rights work and to keep the issue of enforced disappearances present in the public sphere.

HuMENA also considers that this case clearly reveals the restrictive impact of Law No. 12-06 on associations. In practice, this law does not function as a neutral framework for regulating freedom of association. Rather, it grants the administration broad powers to delay or refuse registration, restrict activities, and make the continued existence of associations contingent on authorization and administrative oversight. It also imposes constraints on cooperation and access to resources, making the existence and activities of independent associations dependent on administrative decisions that lack sufficient guarantees of transparency and legal certainty. The closure of the association's office is therefore inseparable from a broader legal and administrative framework that renders independent civic work fragile and vulnerable to restriction at any time.

This measure cannot be separated from the broader context of shrinking civic space in Algeria. In recent years, independent associations, media outlets, and human rights defenders have been repeatedly targeted, with increasing use of legal and administrative tools to restrict peaceful organization and public action. In this context, shutting down an association working on enforced disappearances does not appear as an isolated measure, but as a clear extension of a broader pattern of dismantling independent civil society structures, weakening their ability to operate openly, and excluding them from the public sphere.

HuMENA stresses that the seriousness of this issue goes beyond freedom of association to include the right to truth. Enforced disappearance is not a historical issue that can be closed administratively or politically. It is a grave violation that remains ongoing as long as the fate and whereabouts of victims remain unknown, and as long as their families are deprived of truth, justice, and redress. From this perspective, closing the association's office not only restricts the right to organize, but also undermines families' ability to continue demanding their rights, defending their collective memory, and resisting attempts to erase or sideline this issue from public debate.

HuMENA considers the closure of the "SOS Disappeared" office to be a dual violation: an attack on freedom of association and independent human rights work, and an attack on the right of families of the disappeared to truth and justice. It reflects the Algerian authorities' insistence on subjecting civic space to administrative and legal restrictions rather than ensuring the protection necessary for independent associations and human rights defenders. This measure sends a dangerous message that human rights work related to serious violations remains subject to repression, even when it concerns the legitimate and fundamental demands of victims' families.

HuMENA calls on the Algerian authorities to:

- Immediately lift the administrative closure of the "SOS Disappeared" office and allow it to resume its work and activities freely and without arbitrary interference.
- Refrain from using registration requirements as a pretext to restrict or shut down independent human rights associations.
- Guarantee the right of families of the disappeared to organize and engage in peaceful, public advocacy for truth, justice, and redress.
- End all forms of harassment targeting the association's members and leadership, including

bans on activities, restrictions on communication and operational tools, and any arbitrary measures affecting its legal or practical existence.

- Review Law No. 12-06 on associations to ensure its compliance with Algeria's international obligations regarding freedom of association and human rights work.
- Respect Algeria's international commitments related to the protection of civic space and ensure a safe and enabling environment for associations and human rights defenders.

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