Algeria | HuMENA Condemns the Upheld Sentence Against Boualem Sansal: A Grave Violation of Freedom of Expression and Fair Trial Guarantees

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HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement strongly condemns the July 1, 2025, decision by the Algerian Appeal Court to uphold the politically motivated five-year prison sentence and a fine of 500,000 Algerian dinars (approximately $3,700 USD) against the renowned French-Algerian writer Boualem Sansal. This verdict represents a serious breach of Algeria's national and international human rights obligations and reflects an intensifying pattern of repression against dissent.

Sansal, 75, was arrested on November 16, 2024, upon his arrival at Houari Boumediene International Airport. For more than a week, his whereabouts remained unknown, raising credible concerns of enforced disappearance. During this period, he was denied access to legal counsel and held incommunicado in violation of due process guarantees under both Algerian law and Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Algeria is a state party. These actions also contravene Article 45 of the Algerian Constitution, which guarantees the right to a fair trial.

The charges against Sansal, "undermining national unity" and "threatening the stability of state institutions" under Article 87 bis of the Algerian Penal Code, stem solely from peaceful comments made in a French media interview. In that interview, Sansal criticized the Algerian authorities and raised concerns about civil liberties and governance. There is no evidence of incitement to violence or hate. His conviction is a clear violation of Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 54 of the Algerian Constitution, which protect the right to freedom of expression.

Human rights organizations have widely condemned Article 87 bis for its vague and overly broad language, which allows Algerian authorities to criminalize dissent arbitrarily. Its continued application undermines the rule of law. It violates Algeria's obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which guarantees freedom of expression and the right to participate in public affairs.

Sansal's imprisonment is emblematic of the broader crackdown on writers, journalists, artists, and civil society actors in Algeria. Despite his global recognition, having received numerous literary honors, including the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade and membership in the Académie Française, Sansal has not been spared the state's repressive machinery. His case underscores that no one is immune to persecution in Algeria, regardless of their international stature.

In January 2025, the European Parliament adopted Resolution TA/2025/0005, which condemned

Sansal's detention, called for his immediate release, and emphasized that respect for human rights must be a prerequisite for any future EU-Algeria cooperation. Prominent international organizations and over 150 writers, Nobel laureates, and cultural figures have echoed this call and denounced the Algerian government's actions. Reports confirm that Sansal began a hunger strike while in detention, in protest of his arbitrary imprisonment.

HuMENA calls on the Algerian authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Boualem Sansal, annul his conviction, and provide full redress for the violations he has endured;
- Abolish Article 87 bis and all other vague or overly broad legal provisions routinely weaponized to suppress peaceful expression and dissent;
- Take concrete steps to ensure full and consistent compliance with Algeria's obligations under international human rights law, including the ICCPR, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and the Algerian Constitution.

We further urge the European Union, United Nations Special Procedures, and Algeria's international partners to take firm action and publicly denounce Sansal's imprisonment. Future diplomatic and economic engagement with Algeria must be conditioned on concrete progress in human rights.

> **Sansal's case is not an isolated incident; it is part of a deliberate strategy to silence the voices of conscience. The international community must act with urgency and principle. Impunity cannot be the price of partnership.**

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