

Advocacy dossier

Slimane Bouhafs

سليمان بوحفص

At liberty **Algeria**

Chairman of the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians in Algeria, advocate for freedom of expression and democracy. Abducted from Tunisia in August 2021 and forcibly returned to Algeria, acquitted of terrorism charges but sentenced to three years in prison on other charges, and released in September 2024 after serving the sentence. In March 2026 he learned he is under a travel ban.

01
The case at a glance

Chairman of the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians in Algeria, advocate for freedom of expression and democracy. Abducted from Tunisia in August 2021 and forcibly returned to Algeria, acquitted of terrorism charges but sentenced to three years in prison on other charges, and released in September 2024 after serving the sentence. In March 2026 he learned he is under a travel ban.

Status **At liberty**	Arrested **25 Aug 2021**	Country **Algeria**
Sentence Three years in prison and a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars (approximately 660 euros).		
Charges Belonging to a terrorist organisation Receiving funds from abroad for the purpose of political propaganda Hate speech and discrimination Use of technology to spread false information Conspiracy		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Immediately end all transnational targeting of Slimane Bouhafs, including surveillance, defamation campaigns, Interpol misuse, and consular harassment.

02 Withdraw any in-absentia convictions or politically motivated charges tied to peaceful human rights work.

03 Comply with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and OHCHR guidance on transnational repression.

04 Immediately lift the travel ban imposed on Slimane Bouhafs and on any family members affected by the same order.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

Enforced disappearance International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16

Forced exile International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12(4)

Forced return / refoulement Convention against Torture, Article 3

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Prolonged pretrial detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)

Torture Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

Transnational repression UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Travel ban International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 12

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

31 July 2016

Arrest

Arrested over Facebook posts

The gendarmerie arrested him in Sétif province over Facebook posts and charged him with offending the Prophet.

7 August 2016

Conviction

First instance court sentences him to five years

A first instance court in Sétif province sentenced him to five years in prison over his Facebook posts, a week after his arrest.

6 September 2016

Appeal: sentence reduced

Appeal court sentences him to three years

The Sétif Court of Appeal reduced a five-year first instance sentence to three years in prison for offending the Prophet over Facebook posts.

March 2018

Release

Released after a presidential pardon cut his sentence

He was released in 2018 after a presidential pardon reduced his prison term, having spent nearly two years in prison.

September 2018

Departure into exile

Leaves Algeria for Tunisia

Fearing further persecution, he left Algeria for Tunisia.

September 2019

Context

Recognised as a refugee in Tunisia

UNHCR recognised him as a refugee in Tunisia.

25 August 2021

Arrest

Abducted in Tunisia and forcibly returned

Bouhafs was abducted by Algerian security forces in Tunisia, where he held refugee status. He was subjected to ill-treatment and forcibly transferred back to Algeria in violation of international law.

1 September 2021

Reappearance in custody

Appeared before investigating judge

After days of enforced disappearance, Bouhafs appeared before an investigating judge at a court in Algiers and was charged with terrorism-related offenses based on alleged links to the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie.

20 September 2021

Context

UN experts write to Tunisia and Algeria

UN experts wrote to the governments of Tunisia and Algeria about his abduction and return. Tunisia did not reply.

16 December 2022

Conviction

Sentenced to three years in prison

The court of first instance acquitted Bouhafs of the terrorism charges but convicted him of undermining national unity, hate speech and spreading false information, sentencing him to three years in prison and a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars.

4 July 2023

Appeal: judgment upheld

Appeal court upholds sentence

The Algiers Court of Appeal confirmed the three-year prison sentence and the fine, rejecting defence arguments about lack of evidence and due process violations.

1 September 2024

Release

Released after serving full sentence

Bouhafs was released from prison after completing his three-year sentence.

27 February 2026

Context

Questioned at length by border police

Border police questioned him at length at the airport and he missed a flight arranged with help from a rights organisation.

6 March 2026

Travel ban imposed

Told at the airport that he is under a travel ban

Border police told him at the airport that he is under a travel ban, although he had received no official notification.

30 March 2026

Context

UN complaint filed over his abduction

MENA Rights Group filed a complaint on his behalf with the UN Human Rights Committee over Tunisia's failure to investigate his 2021 abduction.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against current sources. Slimane Bouhafs has been free since 1 September 2024 but remains barred from leaving Algeria: on 6 March 2026 border police told him he was under a travel ban of which he had received no notice, and on 30 March 2026 MENA Rights Group filed a complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee over Tunisia's failure to investigate his 2021 abduction. He was tried in the same case as Kamira Nait Sid, who was also released on 1 September 2024.

Background and Work

Slimane Bouhafs is a human rights defender whose work centres on freedom of expression, democracy, and the protection of religious minorities in Algeria. He chairs the St. Augustine Coordination of Christians in Algeria, an organisation advocating for minority rights and freedom of religion in a context where dissent and difference are often met with repression. Bouhafs used social media platforms to reach audiences inside and outside Algeria, calling for democratic reform and challenging government narratives.

His activism placed him at risk. In July 2016 he was arrested over Facebook posts, and in September 2016 an appeal court sentenced him to three years in prison for offending the Prophet. He was released in March 2018 after a presidential pardon reduced his sentence. In September 2018 he left for Tunisia, where UNHCR recognised him as a refugee in 2019. But exile offered no protection.

Abduction and Forced Return

On 25 August 2021, Algerian security forces abducted Bouhafs in Tunisia. He was subjected to ill-treatment and forcibly transferred back to Algeria in violation of the principle of non-refoulement and Tunisia's obligations under international refugee law. The abduction was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of transnational repression targeting Algerian activists in exile.

For days, Bouhafs' whereabouts remained unknown. He reappeared on 1 September 2021 before an investigating judge at a court in Algiers. He was charged with belonging to a terrorist organisation, receiving foreign funds for political propaganda, hate speech and discrimination, using technology to spread false information, and conspiracy. The charges were based on alleged affiliation with the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylie, which the Algerian authorities classify as a terrorist group. Bouhafs denied the allegations.

Legal Proceedings

On 16 December 2022, the court of first instance acquitted Bouhafs of the terrorism charges but convicted him of undermining national unity, hate speech and spreading false information. It sentenced him to three years in prison and imposed a fine of 100,000 Algerian dinars, approximately 660 euros. Defence counsel challenged the proceedings, citing the absence of credible evidence and violations of fair trial standards.

On 4 July 2023, the Algiers Court of Appeal upheld the sentence and the fine. The appeal judgment confirmed the original conviction without addressing the procedural deficiencies raised by the defence. Throughout the trial and appeal, Bouhafs

maintained that he was being targeted for his peaceful human rights work and his advocacy for freedom of expression and belief.

Detention and Release

Bouhafs remained in detention from August 2021 through the completion of his sentence. Conditions of his imprisonment and any health impacts during this period have not been publicly documented in detail. He was released on 1 September 2024, having served the full three-year term.

On 6 March 2026, border police told him at the airport that he is under a travel ban, although he had received no official notification. On 30 March 2026, MENA Rights Group filed a complaint on his behalf with the UN Human Rights Committee over Tunisia's failure to investigate his 2021 abduction.

Transnational Repression

The forced return of Bouhafs from Tunisia represents a clear case of transnational repression. Despite holding refugee status, he was abducted by Algerian security forces operating across an international border and returned to face charges in a judicial system that denied him due process. The violation of non-refoulement protections and the use of abduction to silence a defender in exile illustrate the reach of state repression beyond national borders.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/slimane-bouhafs/

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement is a non-governmental organisation documenting the situation of human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa. This file is based on the public record of the case in the defenders archive.Status as recorded on 2024-09-01. To report an error: archive@humena.org