



Delivered by: Nada Awad, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

- UN Human Rights Council 46th Session
- Joint Oral Intervention¹
- Panel Discussion on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests (HRC res. 44/20)
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Madam President,

As of 18 September, at least [227 Algerians are currently detained and 2,000 are being prosecuted](#) in relation to their participation in the “Hirak” pro-democracy protest movement or their coverage of peaceful protests, such as activist Chems Eddine Laalami, and journalist [Rabah Karèche](#).

These imprisonments and prosecutions illustrate an institutionalized crackdown on peaceful protesters, minorities, journalists and human rights defenders, including by [resorting](#) to scapegoating, and recently by increasing the use of terrorism and criminal charges carrying heavy penalties.

Illustrating this escalation, since 29 April, Algerian authorities have been prosecuting 15 Hirak activists, including human rights defender Kaddour Chouicha and journalists Jamila Loukil and Said Boudour, for terrorism-related charges that may result in harsh sentences including the death penalty.

Human rights lawyer [Abderraouf Arslane](#), member of the Collective for the Defense of Hirak Detainees, has been in pre-trial detention since 26 May on similar terrorism-related charges.

¹ Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Jubilee Campaign, MENA Rights Group, Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network (African Defenders), and World Organisation against Torture (OMCT)

In May, authorities arrested Hirak activists Fatima Boudouda, Moufida Kharchi and Hakima Bahri and accused them of “conspiracy” against the state and "enrollment in a terrorist organization" for exercising their rights to peaceful assembly and free expression; they also revoked judge Saad Eddin Merzouk for expressing his support to the Hirak movement.

On 8 June, the Algerian President amended the Penal Code to [expand the definition of terrorism](#) in a way that would further allow for the criminalisation of peaceful protests.

The abduction of [Slimane Bouhafas](#), a political refugee and Christian Amazigh activist formerly convicted of blasphemy, in Tunis on 25 August, and his subsequent transfer to Algiers to be prosecuted on terrorism-related charges, is another symptom of this escalation. It amounts to a gross violation of refugee rights, and sets a dangerous precedent.

These prosecutions of peaceful protesters and journalists have largely been supported by the arbitrary designation of political opposition movements Rachad and the Movement for the Self-determination of Kabylie (MAK) on 18 May as "[terrorists](#)", without any judicial process. On [18 August](#), the High Security Council (HCS) accused the MAK and Rachad of being responsible for the devastating forest fires that overtook northeastern Algeria over the summer and threatened their members with "total eradication".

Now is the time for the Council to act to protect the fundamental rights of Algerians to participate in peaceful protests and report on them safely.

Thank you.