



October 14, 2021

The Honorable James P. McGovern  
The Honorable Chris Smith  
Co-Chairs  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission  
House Committee on Foreign Affairs  
5100 O'Neil Federal Building  
200 C Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission,

Our organizations are thankful to your commitment to promote human rights and for the Defending Freedoms Project which has led to the release of several religious and political prisoners of conscience.

The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC) has been particularly successful in advocating for the release of prisoners of conscience in Algeria, most recently in the case of journalist Khaled Drareni. A [joint statement by the TLHRC chairs](#) to the Ambassador of Algeria to the US in September 2020 led to Mr. Drareni's release in February 2021 and the overturn of his conviction by Algeria's Supreme Court.

We are therefore writing to request your intervention in the case of another Algerian religious prisoner of conscience, Hamid Soudad, who the authorities sentenced to five years in prison for alleged blasphemy. We appeal to the Commission to recognize him as prisoner of conscience and to write to the Ambassador of Algeria to the US requesting his immediate release.

In addition to adopting Mr. Soudad as a prisoner of conscience, we ask that you hold a hearing on the human rights situation in Algeria, which has steadily deteriorated over the past year. At least 2,000 people are currently prosecuted for exercising their fundamental rights and religious and ethnic minorities are increasingly targeted, notably with [arbitrary terrorism-related prosecutions](#) and blasphemy charges. As the country's Universal Periodic Review approaches in 2022, Algeria will be keen to show a positive human rights record, therefore we believe now would be a key time to exert diplomatic pressure. We also recommend members of the TLHRC to call on the State Department to designate Algeria as a Country of Particular Concern, in line with [House Resolution 512](#), due to its continued and systemic religious freedom violations and its application of blasphemy laws which indirectly penalizes individuals for enjoying the fundamental right to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice.

In January 2021, authorities arrested and sentenced Hamid Soudad to the maximum penalty of five years in prison for sharing a Facebook post that allegedly offended the "precepts of Islam" (article 144 bis2 of the Penal Code). The judgement was confirmed on appeal in March 2021. According to Mr. Soudad's lawyer, the court broke from earlier precedent by sentencing Mr. Soudad to the maximum sentence of five

years solely due to Mr. Soudad's Christian faith and membership of the Algerian Protestant Church (EPA). This can be evidenced in the court judgement which mentions Mr. Soudad's religious affiliation and conversion in the facts of the case.

In August 2021, the Jubilee Campaign, together with members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable in DC, submitted a [letter](#) to the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion, with the Embassy of Algeria to the US in copy, which outlined the details of Mr. Soudad's arbitrary detention and called for his immediate release.

According to Mr. Soudad's family, lawyers and civil society contacts on the ground, a Presidential pardon would be the most viable option to secure his release, as all appeals in lower and appellate courts have failed and a referral to the Supreme Court would take years before it is even considered.

The detention and sentencing of Hamid Soudad comes amidst an increasingly hostile national climate for religious and ethnic minorities and freedom of belief, as illustrated by the sentencing of academic [Saïd Djabelkhir](#) for blasphemy and the prosecution of Christian political activist [Slimane Bouhafis](#), a refugee abducted from neighboring Tunisia, on trumped up politically-motivated charges. Algeria has unscrupulously classified human rights activists and political dissidents as 'terrorists' to justify detaining them. In addition, as of September 2021, Algerian authorities continue to keep 16 EPA churches shuttered and have also been shutting down Ahmadi houses of worship.

Sincerely,

Signatures:

#### Organizations

- ADF International
- Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
- Christian Freedom International
- Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
- Coptic Solidarity
- Forum for Religious Freedom Europe
- Human Rights Without Frontiers
- International Christian Concern
- International Organization to Preserve Human Rights
- Jubilee Campaign
- Middle East Concern
- Prayer Pioneers
- Set My People Free

#### Individuals

Scott Morgan  
*President*  
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