



## THE SHRINKING SPACE OF THE ALGERIAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The State's stranglehold on the freedom of the press



The arrest of Ihsane El Kadi, which shook not only the media networks but also a significant part of the international community, is one of the most blatant and relevant examples of the danger hanging over press freedom in Algeria. The director of *Radio M* and *Maghreb Emergent*, two

independent media, was sentenced to seven years in prison, two of which were suspended, and fined DZ 700,000. The verdict went even further, ordering the dissolution of *Interface Media* and imposing a fine of 10 million Algerian dinars. This heavy sentence was the Algerian regime's swift response to the publication of an article criticizing the authorities. Ihsane El Kadi was thus accused of having received funds from abroad to initiate political propaganda and destabilize state security.

In response to this outrageous attack on press freedom, Amnesty International has launched a petition calling on the President of the Republic to release the journalist immediately, while pointing an accusing finger at the censorship, and even repression, affecting the media.

Simultaneously, several public figures from various nationalities jointly signed a letter

addressed to the President Abdelmadjid Tebboune to free the imprisoned journalist.

The repressive arsenal also affected journalist Mustapha Bendjama, who was sentenced in absentia, in December 2021, to a year's imprisonment and a fine of 50,000 Algerian dinars, following a complaint lodged against him by the Wali of Annaba, which accused him of publishing information intended to harm the national interest. The editor-in-chief of *Le provincial* was scrutinized by the authorities, and his arrest occurred just after he was accused of being involved in the Amira Bouraoui case. It is worth noting that Bendjama's trial was postponed for the third time only to be held on July 9<sup>th</sup> 2023.

Arrest is not the only means used by the authorities to restrict the freedom of the press : bans on leaving the national territory (IST) are also very common. Khaled Dreneni, Reporters Without Borders' representative in North Africa, was prevented from travelling to Spain, as he was about to receive the "Anoche tuve un seno" press freedom prize. The restriction on the journalist's freedom continued even after his meeting with Abdelmajid Tebboune, on International Press Day. The Algerian authorities finally lifted the IST in 2020, but this belated decision prevented the journalist from receiving his prize.

### **The new bill on audiovisual and press**

As if arrests and ISTs were not enough, the Algerian authorities have also targeted the audiovisual and press law, with the aim of providing a legal basis for their actions against journalists. The National People's Assembly (APN) added a series of 13 amendments prohibiting, among other things, the management by a single individual or legal entity of more than one press organ and allowing the sealing of any organ that undermines Islam or national unity.

The amendments also introduce two regulatory authorities, the first for broadcasting and the second for print and electronic media. In this context, the President of the Republic will be responsible for appointing the members of both authorities.

Amendments such as these narrow the civic space. As they introduce extremely vague terms such as "undermining Islam and national unity", any

attempt at opposition or criticism of the power could be wiped out under the pretext of Islam and national unity. This bill would only strengthen the control of the authorities, who already rule with an iron fist.

### **Adoption of the law on information: a legal arsenal of terror and repression**

The new information bill, adopted on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023, will further restrict the freedom and independence of Algerian media landscape. Under such a law, Algerian media that receive "*funding*" or "*direct or indirect material assistance from any foreign party*" will be liable to a substantial heavy fine. They will also have to appear before a High Council of Professional Ethics, 12 of whose members will also be appointed directly by the President.

Moreover, while the law should guarantee journalists' right to professional secrecy, it obliges them however to reveal their sources once requested by the courts, thereby putting at risk not only the journalist in question, but also the sources themselves.

Restrictions also apply to dual nationals, who are prohibited from owning or holding shares in a media outlet in Algeria. In addition, under this restrictive law, foreign media are still required to obtain accreditation to work in Algeria, under some conditions. Journalists will also be liable to a fine of between 500,000 and 1 million dinars for contempt committed against the President of the Republic or a member of a diplomatic mission.

These new provisions subject the Algerian media to a virtually unrestricted surveillance. Algeria now ranks 136<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the 2023 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

### **ADVOCACY MISSION IN GENEVA**

A delegation of CFDA and FEMED members led an advocacy mission in Geneva. The mission took place from May 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

The delegation met several key figures from the permanent missions of the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Canada. It also had the opportunity to meet representatives of the Special Rapporteurs on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, on the promotion of truth, justice

and reparation, on the situation of human rights defenders, on human rights and counterterrorism, and on violence against women and girls.



### **Submission of the files of the disappeared to the UN working group (WGEID)**

During the advocacy mission, our delegation submitted 30 files of people who disappeared in Algeria to the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances (WGEID).

The creation and ongoing updating of these files, as well as their submission to UN bodies, is essential to enable the families of the disappeared to obtain recognition of their suffering from international bodies. It is essential that they know that their struggle transcends national borders, since they are the framework of almost total impunity.

### **MEMORIAL OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EVENTS OF MARCH 1973**

In March 1973, the Moroccan town of Figuig experienced a myriad of human rights violations as part of the repression orchestrated by the Moroccan state. The memory of the atrocities committed still haunts the family members of the victims of enforced disappearance, whose fate remains unknown to this day.

To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the events of March 1973, the Medical Association for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence (AMRVT)

and the Moroccan Forum for Truth and Justice (FMVJ), with the support of the FEMED and many human rights associations, organized a caravan of remembrance and truth, which set off on May 26th, 2023. The main aim of the caravan was to preserve memory and combat the impunity that reigns in the country.

Human rights defenders, victims of violations, their families and civil society actors gathered with candles to pay tribute to all the victims of 1973.

CFDA President Nassera DUTOUR spoke at the event, stressing the importance of preserving memory, which raises awareness among present and future generations about human rights violations and enforced disappearances, and encourages the construction of a fairer and a more respectful society.



### **REUNION WITH CLÉMENT VOULE, UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY AND ASSOCIATION**

In a context of repression against civil society actors, Euromed Rights organized an online meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right of peaceful assembly and association, Mr. Clément Voule, on June 5, 2023 at 2pm.

A report on the situation of freedom of association and expression was prepared and presented to the Special Rapporteur. It highlighted a multitude of violations and displayed recommendations on behalf of Algerian civil society, while urging UN bodies to repeal repressive laws and put an end to practices that restrict and criminalize freedom of association, assembly, and demonstration.

CFDA President, Nassera Dutour, discussed advocacy efforts in a context of absolute

repression against human rights defenders, and mentioned the threats that targeted the offices of SOS Disparus. On Wednesday January 25, 2023, indeed, at 6pm, two police officers, one in combat gear and the other in civilian clothes, accompanied by an official police car, rang the doorbell of the SOS Disparus offices in Algiers. They were looking for the owner of the premises to give him a summons to appear before the public prosecutor's office.

## NASSERA DUTOUR'S FIGHT AGAINST ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCE

Wardiya Ben Mamar traces the career of Madame Dutour, President of the CFDA and FEMED, in a film entitled "Nassera Dutour's fight against enforced disappearances". The film is dedicated to her fight for the victims of enforced disappearance since the 90s, and her exceptional work in preserving memory.

The director's first documentary, produced by the Lil'Art association, was broadcast on June 23, 2023, at the Jean Vigo cinema in Gennevilliers at 6pm.



## BRIEFS

### Conference: the freedom of the press in the Maghreb and North Africa

On May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the international day for the freedom of the press, Riposte Internationale (RI) and the CFDA organized a conference on freedoms in the Maghreb.

Journalists and activists from countries of the Maghreb gathered around a panel discussion, that

revealed extremely important in the current context of shrinking civil space in Algeria.

### Ceremony at the UK Embassy in Algeria

Our Algerian antenna, SOS Disparus, received an invitation from the British Embassy to attend the Coronation Ceremony of King Charles III on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

The ceremony was attended by friends of the Commonwealth, government representatives and volunteers. The presence of SOS Disparus at such a large-scale ceremony was assured by Me AIDOUN Dalel.



### Reception at the European Union delegation in Algeria

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, on Europe Day, SOS Disparus took part in a reception organized by the European Union delegation in Algeria.



### Mother's Day celebration at SOS Disparus

Mothers of the missing gathered at the offices of SOS Disparus to celebrate Mother's Day.

It was a wonderful opportunity not only to celebrate these wonderful women who have had to endure the loss of their loved ones, but also to preserve the memory of the disappeared, which is one of the main missions of our association.

Following the gathering, the mothers spent a convivial afternoon at SOS Disparus headquarters, sharing stories and testimonials. Small gifts were given to the mothers who came.

We fully believe that these moments are of the utmost importance for these women who have spent their entire lives fighting for truth and justice.



## **Press release:**

### **April**

[Revue de presse – Avril 2023](#)

### **May**

[Revue de presse – Mai 2023](#)

### **June**

[Revue de presse – Juin 2023](#)

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