Algeria: Two Human Rights Activists Arbitrarily Detained

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On 15 November 2015, the police arrested Adel Ayachi and Tijani Ben Derrah, two bloggers and human rights activists who had, the day before, participated in a peaceful protest for freedom of expression.

Almost three months later, the two activists remain detained in the prison of El Harrach, a suburb of Algiers, awaiting trial. Alkarama seized the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights Defenders (SR HRD) with their case on 8 February 2016.

Following their participation to a peaceful sit-in held in Algiers on 14 November 2015 to protest against repeated attacks on freedom of expression and to call for the release of Hassan Bouras - a journalist and human rights activist arrested in Al-Bayadh on 2 October 2015 - Adel and Tijani were arrested on the street while they were heading to a police station in the capital to support another activist, Manar Mansri, summoned by the police earlier that morning and released the same day.

During their interrogation, they were asked to explain their participation in the 14 November demonstration and their activities as online journalists.

At the end of a particularly trying time in custody, during which they were deprived of food for several days and subjected to intense psychological pressure, they were brought before the prosecutor of the Algiers Court. A criminal investigation was opened against them for "undermining a government body" and "incitement to terrorism" without any specific act being attributed to them.

"The crackdown on peaceful activists like Adel and Tijani based on false accusations is part of a repression policy practiced by the regime since the 1990's and the black decade that resulted in thousands of deaths, tens of thousands of missing people and a large number of displaced persons," explains Manar Mansri.

"While Adel chose words through his blog to educate young people to peaceful struggle rather than violence and terrorism, he is accused of inciting to the terrorism that he explicitly fights," she continues. "By repeating the mistakes of the past, the Algerian authorities risk pushing the situation out of control, while human rights activism and peaceful struggle through blogs and other peaceful means of expression seek to save Algeria from a chaotic revolution."

Adel Ayachi and Tijani Ben Derrah's detention reflects the authorities' willingness to drastically limit freedoms in the country. It should be noted that Algeria remains far behind - 119th out of 180 - in the 2015 World Press Freedom Index established by the NGO Reporters without Borders.

Concerned about the repeated violations of Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) - ratified by Algeria in September 1989 - which guarantees the rights to freedom of expression and of peaceful assembly in Algeria, Alkarama denounces the current repression affecting anyone peacefully expressing discordant opinions on the internet or in the streets.

The Foundation therefore calls on the SR HRD to urge the Algerian authorities to release these two human rights activists without delay.