

Algeria arrests those ‘peacefully criticising the government’, Amnesty

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Algerian authorities regularly jail opposition figures and activists, even those who “peacefully” criticise the government, Amnesty International reported today.

The organisation highlighted the case of journalist and blogger Mohamed Tamalt. A British citizen, Tamalt was jailed in July 2016 for two years because he posted a poem about President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on Facebook. “He accused prison guards of beating him” during his court hearing.

“He started a hunger strike in June when he was arrested. He died in a coma in hospital in December. The authorities have failed to adequately investigate the allegations that he was beaten in detention, his treatment in prison and his death,” the report said.

The NGO also cited the case of Zoulikha Belarbi, a member of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), who was found to be “guilty of defamation” and “contempt of the President of the Republic”. Belarbi was subsequently sentenced for posting a “satirical photomontage showing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and politicians,” the report stated.

Religious Freedoms

The report also highlighted the case of the Ahmadiyya community in Algeria. “According to media reports and civil society groups, as of June, the authorities targeted members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, arresting more than 50 people because of their faith.”

Amnesty International says that dozens of people were arrested in 2015 following the violence in the



South, in the city of Ghardaïa where many “remained in detention awaiting trial” in the latter part of 2016.

“They were subject to judicial investigation for terrorism and incitement to terrorism. Among these detainees was Kamel Eddine Fekhar, a political activist, as well as other supporters of the autonomy of the region.”

Expulsions of migrants

As for the rights of refugees and migrants in the country, Amnesty noted that no law “was enacted at the end of the year” against mistreatment in Algeria.

“In December, security forces arrested around 1,500 migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa in Algiers,” the NGO continued in the report.

“There have been clashes between residents and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, Bechar and Ouargla in March, Tamanrasset in July and Algiers in November,” the report explained.

According to Amnesty, security forces “reportedly expelled several hundreds of them towards Niger in the days that followed [the clashes].”

“The people who were not expelled were released in Tamanrasset, a town in the south of the country, where they would not have been allowed to use public transport. The ban was meant to prevent them from returning to Algiers.”

According to the report: “This year, the authorities have left a number of civil society associations, such as Amnesty International Algeria, in a legal vacuum,” making human rights abuses in the country difficult to record by independent bodies.

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