

JAMES P. MCGOVERN, Massachusetts
Co-Chair



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Co-Chair

One Hundred and Sixteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

September 11, 2020

His Excellency Madjid Bouguerra
Ambassador of Algeria to the United States of America
Embassy of Algeria
2118 Kalorama Road NW
Washington, DC 20008

Via email: congressional@algerianembassy.org

Dear Ambassador,

As Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, an official bipartisan body of the United States Congress that coordinates the Defending Freedoms Project on behalf of prisoners of conscience worldwide, we write to express our concern regarding the arbitrary detention and sentencing of Khaled Drareni to three years in prison in Algeria.

Khaled Drareni is a journalist who serves as the Algeria correspondent for Reporters sans frontières (RSF) and TV5 Monde, and is also the editor of the *Casbah Tribune* news website. On August 10, 2020, Mr. Drareni was sentenced to three years in prison and given a fine of 50,000 dinars for “inciting an unarmed gathering” and “endangering national unity” after he reported on the Hirak protest movement.¹ During his trial, the prosecution accused him of criticizing the Algerian political system on Facebook and reporting a call by a coalition of political parties for a general strike. He was convicted under Articles 79 and 100 of Algeria’s Penal Code which have been described by international organizations as “excessively vague.”²

Both the United States and Algeria have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which under Article 19 protects the right to freedom of expression.³ We note the Human Rights Committee recommendation in the fourth periodic report of Algeria which states, “Release from prison all persons whose conviction had stemmed from their having exercised

¹ New York Times, “Algerian Journalist Sentenced to 3 Years for Reporting on Protests,” August 8, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/10/world/africa/Algerian-journalist-Khaled-Drareni-convicted.html>

² Reporters sans frontières, “RSF calls for the immediate release of its Algeria correspondent, Khaled Drareni.”

³ The United Nations General Assembly. “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” Treaty Series, vol. 999, Dec. 1966, Art 19.

their right to freedom of expression under article 19 of the Covenant and grant those persons full compensation for the harm suffered.”⁴ Additionally, Article 50 of the Algerian Constitution of 2016 guarantees freedom of the press and prohibits the state from bringing criminal charges against journalists in relation to their work.⁵

It is our understanding that Khaled Drareni’s appeal will be decided on September 15th and that prosecutors are now seeking a four-year sentence instead of the original three-year sentence he was given in August. We respectfully ask that our concerns regarding the arbitrary detention and sentencing of Khaled Drareni be conveyed to the Government of Algeria. We hope that the immediate and unconditional release of Khaled Drareni, as well as all other prisoners of conscience imprisoned for exercising their freedom of expression, will mark a renewed commitment from Algeria to consolidate its democratic reforms and champion freedom of expression and the press.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, TLHRC

⁴ The Human Rights Committee considered [the fourth periodic report of Algeria](#) (CCPR/C/DZA/4) at its 3494th and 3495th meetings (see CCPR/C/SR.3494 and 3495), held on 4 and 5 July 2018. It adopted the concluding observations at its 3517th meeting, held on 20 July 2018. Section 44 (b) (pg. 9).

⁵ Algerian Constitution of 2016, Article 50.