

# HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE STILL DETAINED THREE YEARS AFTER ALGERIA'S HIRAK

ACHRS STATEMENT | FLORIAN LHABITANT



**Three years after the massive protests, at least 280 activists remain imprisoned in Algeria. They were detained arbitrarily based on blurred accusations. ACHRS condemns the detention of political opponents and activists, and calls for their immediate release.**

## What is Hirak?

Hirak corresponds to a series of protests occurring in Algeria for three years. The first major protest was in the Kabylia region on 16th February 2019, before the movement spread through all the country with massive protests gathering up to five million people on 8th March 2019. Algerian protesters, mainly young people and students, firstly opposed former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's fifth mandate. Protesters also opposed corruption and supported the democratization of society, including the release of all political prisoners. Bouteflika eventually gave up the power on 2nd April 2019, but his former Prime Minister took power, which did not address the aspirations of the people. Hirak was characterized by highly pacifist protesters and the vast number of people arrested, and around 280 of them are still detained.

## Repression of Hirak

The government used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to repress the Hirak movement. People were no longer allowed to protest, and those who did faced terrorism charges. The government argued that protests represented a threat to national security and decided to limit them by pushing pressure on protests leaders. Massive arrests happened in 2021 targeting journalists in order to prevent them from covering the events namely in a climate of fear.

## International Law

Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), signed by Algeria, claims that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice". Furthermore, article 9 of the ICCPR prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention.

## Our Position

ACHRS supports freedom of speech and freedom of the press, therefore we call on the Algerian authorities to immediately release all political prisoners. The more than 280 detained persons are activists, lawyers, journalists, or opponents, and many of them are abusively charged with terrorism. ACHRS condemns the arrest and the repression of citizens based on political charges.