

Algeria urged to free blogger jailed over Facebook poem

ALGIERS - Human Rights Watch appealed for Algerian authorities to free a journalist jailed for two years for offending President Abdelaziz Bouteflika in a poem shared on his Facebook page.



Image by 123RF

Mohamed Tamalt, who has dual Algerian and British nationality, is reportedly in critical condition from a hunger strike he began after his arrest near his parents' house in Algiers on June 27. The blogger and freelance journalist has been detained ever since, under the orders of an investigative judge for "offending the president" and "defaming a public authority", said HRW.

The charges were for Facebook posts including a video showing Bouteflika greeting former French president Nicolas Sarkozy and a poem containing insulting verses about the Algerian leader.

A court in Algiers sentenced him two years in prison on July 11 and fined him 200,00 dinars (\$1,800, 1,632 euros), and an appeals court upheld the ruling on August 9.

"No speech is safe in Algeria if a poem on Facebook can get you two years in prison," said Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. Jailing people for allegedly insulting or offending public officials is unjust and threatens anyone seeking to comment on issues of the day.

"The Algerian authorities should quash the case against Tamalt and send the message that free speech will be respected in

Algeria," said Whitson.

Tamalt has lived in Britain since 2002. A critic of Algerian authorities, he created an online journal in Britain, has blogged his own political views and also written for Algerian daily Al-Khabar. A copy of the video that he shared on Facebook was also uploaded on his online journal.

Human Rights Watch said the court initially ordered his detention "even though these offences carry no prison terms but only fines".

It also said that Algeria's constitution, which was revised on March 7, guarantees the right to freedom of expression. Article 50 stated that the right to freedom of expression may not be used "to harm the dignity, freedom, or rights of others", it said.

But it added that "international human rights standards increasingly recognise that public officials must tolerate speech that could be insulting or offensive".

Source: [AFP](#).

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>