

# URGENT ACTION

## JAILED BROTHER OF ACTIVIST ON HUNGER STRIKE

On 16 February 2023, Algerian father of four and shop owner, Abderrahmane Zitout, started a hunger strike for the third time since his imprisonment, to protest against his prolonged, pre-trial detention which now exceeds 324 days. He languishes in arbitrary detention in El Harrach prison since 5 April 2022, on fabricated charges in a case related to his brother's political activism and membership of political opposition group, Rachad, which the Algerian authorities have labelled as a terrorist group. The authorities must drop the unfounded charges against Abderrahmane Zitout and immediately and unconditionally release him.

### TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

*President of the Republic of Algeria*

*Abdelmajid Tebboune*

*Presidence de la republique*

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*Your Excellency,*

*I am writing to raise concerns about the prolonged and arbitrary pre-trial detention of **Abderrahmane Zitout** in El Harrach prison, Algiers, since 5 April 2022. His health has seriously deteriorated since his imprisonment, and he was denied medical care until he was hospitalised after his second hunger strike in August 2022.*

*On 17 April 2022, a prosecutor at Sidi M'hamed First Instance Court charged Abderrahmane Zitout with "participating in a terrorist group" (Article 87 bis), "publishing fake news undermining national unity" (Article 196 bis), "receiving funds from outside the country with the intention of carrying out actions compromising the security of the state" (Article 95bis), "incitement to un-armed gathering" (Article 100) and "insulting a statutory body" (Article 144). No date has been set for his hearing and he remains in pretrial detention in El Harrach prison in Algiers, 400km from his home. The evidence used against him relates to forced confessions made by former military officer turned whistle-blower, Mohamed Benhlila, who in his testimony alleged that Abderrahmane Zitout's brother Mohamed Larbi had sent him money to open a shop in Algeria, and referred to Abderrahmane Zitout's relationship with his brother and his participation in the Hirak protest movement, as well as some of Abderrahmane Zitout's conversations on Facebook messenger about the Hirak protests.*

*On 16 February, Abderrahmane Zitout started a hunger strike to protest his arbitrary detention of over ten months. In August 2022, after a 20-day hunger strike, Abderrahmane Zitout was hospitalised for 11 days for serious health problems. His family were not given access to his medical records. Abderrahmane Zitout has been put in a wheelchair since being in prison due to his untreated back problems and herniated disk. A source close to him told Amnesty International that he has lost around 10kg since being jailed and that they fear for his life.*

***I urge you to immediately drop all baseless charges against Abderrahmane Zitout and release him immediately and unconditionally. In the meantime, I urge you to grant him access to the hospital so that he can be treated for his ongoing health issues.***

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Abderrahmane Zitout, 40, owns a small clothes shop in Laghouat, a city in northern Algeria around 400km from Algiers, where he lives with his wife and four young children.

On 30 March 2022, police raided his house and shop and put him in incommunicado detention, where they interrogated him for long hours over five days about his relationship with his brother. His brother, Mohamed Larbi Zitout, is an ex- diplomat and founding member of Rachad, a political movement which the Algerian authorities labelled as a terrorist group in February 2022. Mohamed Larbi Zitout is also one of the founding members of human rights organisations [Alkarama](#) and Justitia Universalis (now closed).

On 5 April 2022, a judge at Sidi M'hamed court in Algiers ordered Abderrahmane Zitout's pretrial detention. On 17 April, the prosecutor charged Abderrahmane Zitout on four counts under the penal code; he remains held in pretrial detention. He is not permitted to call his family or lawyers on the phone. He is permitted family visits once every 15 days, for 15 minutes and his lawyers are permitted to visit him. No date has been set for his hearing.

Algerian authorities have used the labelling of Rachad as a terrorist group to prosecute numerous of the group's members under terrorism-related offences, including under Article 87bis, which carries the death penalty and vaguely defines terrorism as any act "against state security, the integrity of the territory, the stability and normal functioning of state institutions."<sup>1</sup> In March 2022, Spanish authorities deported Algerian activist and whistle-blower **Mohamed Benhlila** for his alleged association with Rachad.<sup>2</sup> In September 2021, a judge in Algiers interrogated Hassan Bouras for his alleged links with Rachad.<sup>3</sup>

According to his lawyers' transcripts of the hearings, reviewed by Amnesty International, the authorities used conversations that Abderrahmane Zitout shared on Facebook Messenger and forced confessions made by former military officer turned whistle-blower Mohamed Benhlila which said that Mohamed Larbi had sent money to Abderrahmane Zitout to open a shop in Algeria, as evidence for his prosecution under terrorism related charges. Since July 2022, Abderrahmane Zitout's mother, sisters, and nephews have been persecuted and frequently summoned to the police station, with interrogations focusing on their family relationship with Mohamed Larbi Zitout.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Arabic, French

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 17 April 2023**

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** [Abderrahmane Zitout] (he/him)

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<sup>1</sup> [Algeria: Stop using bogus terrorism charges to prosecute peaceful activists and journalists - Amnesty International](#)

<sup>2</sup> [FI04322\\_2.pdf \(amnesty.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Algeria: Stop using bogus terrorism charges to prosecute peaceful activists and journalists - Amnesty International](#)

## ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Algerian Minister of Justice  
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Salutation: Your Excellency,