

UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of
Opinion and Expression

David Kaye

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Geneva, 17 April 2020

Subject: Urgent appeal on the arrest of Algerian journalist Khaled Drarni

Dear Mr **David Kaye**,

The Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties (GCRL) respectfully request that you consider this urgent appeal in relation to the arrest and arbitrary detention of the Algerian journalist Khaled Drareni who has been in prison since March 29, 2020.

Khaled Drareni is the Algeria correspondent for Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the founder of the Casbah Tribune website. He was covering protests which shook Algeria for most of last year, forcing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign in April 2019, before they were suspended over the coronavirus.

Journalist Drareni was arrested in Algiers on March 7 while covering a peaceful protest, he appeared before the prosecutor and kept in detention for three days before being brought before the prosecutor of the Court of Sidi M'hamed. He was charged with incitement to "an unarmed gathering" and even more serious, "undermining national unity. He was then placed under judicial control.

On March 25, the Algiers Court quashed the judicial review and ordered him held pending investigation. Two days later, on March 27, Drarni was arrested at his house and was held in a police station for two nights. On March 29, the court of Sidi M'Hamed ordered Drareni's detention in el-

Harach prison in Algiers, and on March 30 the court moved him to Kolea prison outside of the capital.

We strongly believe that the detention of journalist Khaled Drareni and the allegations against him appear to be a direct consequence of the peaceful and legitimate exercise of his profession and a clear violation of his right to freedom of the press as guaranteed under Article 50 of the Algerian Constitution and which also states that press offenses could not be met with imprisonment. Journalist Drareni is a victim of unfounded charges and judicial harassment.

Accordingly, we appeal you to intervene urgently to put pressure on the Algerian authorities for the immediate release of journalist Khaled Drareni and for the lifting of all criminal proceedings against him.

Drareni's detention comes amid a wave of arbitrary arrests targeting other journalists such as Sofiane Merakechi, Said Boudour, and before them, journalist Mohamed Tamalt,⁴² who died on December 11, 2016, while serving a two-year sentence. Another journalist victim of this crackdown on press freedom is Said Chitour who was sentenced on November 11, 2018, by the criminal court of Dar El Beida in Algiers, to 16 months in prison and a year suspended (He is currently free).

While governments across the world have already started freeing up cells by releasing prisoners to stem the spread of coronavirus pandemic, the Court of Algiers took advantage of international context to keep journalist Drareni in jail. Algerian authorities should immediately release Khaled Drareni and drop all charges against him.

Dear Mr David Kaye, given the mandate of your Office to promote and Protect the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties respectfully urges you to take every appropriate step to address the case of the Algerian journalist Khaled Drarni as well as all other journalists who arbitrarily prosecuted and to act to put an end to this striking attack on freedom of the press.

Sincerely,
Geneva Council for Rights and Liberties