

Algeria detains three journalists who covered protests

Algerian authorities should immediately release journalists Said Boudour, Abdelmoundji Kheladi, and Adel Azeb Chikh from pretrial detention and drop all charges against them, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Algerian demonstrators chant and wave their country's national flag as they take part in an anti-government protest in the capital Algiers on October 15, 2019. Authorities have detained at least three more journalists in recent days. Credit: CPJ/AFP.

Algeria is scheduled to hold [new presidential elections](#) in December, amid [ongoing protests](#) demanding reform. President Abdelaziz Bouteflika resigned in April, after protests dissuaded him from seeking a fifth term in office, according to [news reports](#).

"Algerian authorities must stop using vague anti-state charges to imprison journalists who cover alleged corruption and anti-government protests," said CPJ's Middle East and North Africa Coordinator Sherif Mansour. "We remind the government that the legitimacy of the upcoming presidential elections will rely in large part on the ability of all journalists to independently cover the situation in the country."

On October 15, a judge at a court in the city of Oran, west of Algiers, the capital, ordered freelance blogger Said Boudour to be held in pretrial detention pending trial on charges of "undermining the morale of the army," "defamation and the spread of false news," and "insulting the regime of Algeria," according to a post by the local human rights organization [National Committee for the Release of Detainees](#) on their Facebook page and [several news sources](#). On October 6, Boudour had turned himself in to the authorities at the Department of National Security in Oran, and was conditionally released the following day, according to [news reports](#). However, that order was overturned on October 15; he is being held in Oran prison, according to [news reports](#).

Last year, Boudour [published stories](#) for the online news outlet *Algeria Direct* that [alleged](#) the participation of public officials in smuggling cocaine into Oran city. More recently, he [covered arrests](#) of anti-government [protesters](#) in Oran and [other stories](#) alleging [corruption](#) for the news website *Journalistes Citoyens d'Algérie* (*Algerian Citizen Journalists*).

Boudour is also member of the local human rights group Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, which [denounced](#) his detention in a statement published on its Facebook page.

In a separate case, [blogger Abdelmoundji Kheladi](#) was arrested on October 7 for posting photos on Facebook of unemployment [protests](#) in the eastern city of Constantine on October 4, according to [news reports](#). On October 15, a judge in Constantine ordered Kheladi's continued detention pending trial, according to a [post on Twitter](#) by his colleague and local

press freedom advocate Khaled Drareni. CPJ was unable to determine the exact charges faced by Kheladi.

Kheladi has written for the news website [Sasa Post](#) and [covered demonstrations](#) in the city of [Constantine](#) on his Facebook page. He produced video updates about ongoing [arrests](#) of activists on his personal [Facebook](#) page and [YouTube](#) channel.

In the third case, on October 14 a judge at a court of the southern city of El Oued ordered the pretrial detention of blogger and radio host [Adel Azeb Chikh](#) on charges of insult and obstruction of traffic in connection with the posting of a [video](#) of a local official on social media without his permission, according to the [National Council of Algerian Journalists](#) and [several news sources](#). He was taken into custody that day, according to [news reports](#).

Three activists were detained on the same charges because of their participation in a protest in front of the office of unemployment a few days before, [according to news reports](#).

Chikh's colleagues at his radio station, El Oued Radio, organized a protest in solidarity with him in front of the station and the region's judicial council, according to [news reports](#).

Last month, the Bir Mourad Rais First Instance Court in Algiers charged freelance journalist Sofiane Merakchi with working for foreign news outlets without a license and evading customs authorities while importing broadcasting equipment, CPJ [reported](#) at the time. On October 14, his appeal for release pending trial was denied by the court, according to [news reports](#).

Since February, Algerian authorities have [censored reporting](#), [expelled foreign journalists](#) covering the protests, [blocked websites](#), and [suspended journalists](#) over their coverage of the protests, according to CPJ reporting.

Algeria's Ministry of Justice did not immediately respond to CPJ's emailed request for comment.

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