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**International Centre for Trade Union Rights**

*Centro Internacional para los Derechos Sindicales*  
*Centre International pour les Droits Syndicaux*

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ICTUR was founded to  
defend and extend trade union rights and  
to raise awareness of these rights and their violations  
around the world

**By e-mail:**

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**February 2017**

**Attn:**

**Abdelaziz Bouteflika**  
**President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria**  
**El Mouradia**  
**Algeria**

**CC:**

**Abdelmalek Sellal, Prime Minister, Algeria**  
**Tayeb Louh, Minister of Justice, Algeria**

**Syndicat National Autonome des Travailleurs de l'Électricité et du Gaz (SNATEG)**

**Public Services International**

Your Excellency,

The International Centre for Trade Union Rights is writing to express its grave concern regarding the sentencing of a trade union leader in Algeria.

ICTUR understands that Mellal Raouf, President of the National Autonomous Electricity and Gas Trade Union (Syndicat National des Travailleurs de l'Électricité et du Gaz, SNATEG) was recently sentenced to 6 months in prison for denouncing a case of corruption at SONELGAZ – the national electricity and gas company – involving the overbilling of more than 8 million users. It is understood that Mellal Raouf was reported by SONELGAZ management to the authorities and subsequently prosecuted for disclosing “confidential information”, even though the irregularities alleged have been confirmed by the Commission de Régulation de l'Electricité et du Gas (CREG). It is further understood that the sentencing of the President of SNATEG is intended as a manoeuvre to intimidate and eradicate the autonomous trade unions from SONELGAZ.

ICTUR wishes to remind the government that Algeria has ratified all eight of the fundamental International Labour Organisation Conventions. The criminalisation of trade unionists for activities related to the defence of the interests of those they represent poses a significant violation of the rights enshrined in those Conventions. According to the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association, workers should enjoy freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to express opinions through the press or otherwise is an essential aspect of trade union rights which "should also be guaranteed when they wish to criticize the government's economic and social policy" (*Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO, Fifth Edition*, paras. 154-157). Moreover, the allegations of corruption made by Mellal Raouf clearly serve a public interest, including the interests of trade union members.

Furthermore, the Committee has stated that "the application of measures designed to control publication and means of information may involve serious interference by administrative authorities with this activity" and "should be subject to judicial review at the earliest possible moment" (*ILO Digest*, para. 166). Such criminal sentences imposed on representatives of workers for their trade union activities not only constitute a serious interference with their freedom of expression, but also pose a significant danger for their free exercise of trade union rights. Where it concerns the arrest, detention or sentencing of a trade union official, the Committee has declared that it is "incumbent upon the government to show that the measures it had taken were in no way occasioned by the trade union activities of the individual concerned" (*ILO Digest*, paras. 92 and 94).

ICTUR calls on the government to drop the charges against Mellal Raouf, to secure his immediate release, and to undertake all necessary measures to comply with Algeria's obligations under international law, to ensure the fundamental freedoms of workers to join and form unions and to take action in defence of their interests. ICTUR will report these incidents in the journal *International Union Rights*, which was established in 1993, and which enjoys a readership in more than 100 countries.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Blackburn', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel Blackburn, Director