

## **UPR Adoption – Algeria September 2017**

Algerian authorities have a track record of resorting to criminal prosecutions against bloggers, journalists and media figures for peaceful speech, using articles in the penal code criminalizing “offending the president,” “insulting state officials” or “denigrating Islam.” They have also prosecuted labor activists who organized or called for peaceful demonstrations on charges such as “unauthorized gathering,” and they continue to ban demonstrations in Algiers.

During its UPR in 2012, the Algerian government responded positively to key recommendations on important human rights problems such as freedom of speech and association, but without tangibly improving the state of public freedoms.

Nevertheless, Algeria did adopt legislation specifically criminalizing domestic violence in 2015, thus implementing several UPR recommendations to strengthen its efforts to combat violence against women. While this law is a welcome step, Algeria needs a more comprehensive legal framework to prevent domestic violence, assist survivors, and prosecute offenders.

Human Rights Watch urges Algeria to accept key recommendations on freedom of speech, assembly and association. In particular, it should accept the recommendation to revise or repeal Law 12-06 on associations, a law extensively used by the government to restrict freedom of association. They should also accept to facilitate the issuance of visas and accreditations without restriction to representatives of international organizations defending human rights and to foreign journalists, and reply favorably to the pending requests of the UN human rights experts and mechanisms to visit Algeria. Despite affirming, in its 2012 UPR review, that its laws are in line with international standards on freedom of speech, Algeria still has prison sentences in its legislation for nonviolent speech offenses, such as for insults and defamation. These articles were used during the review period to prosecute over a dozen people, some of whom went to prison.

Since 2016, Algeria has prosecuted more than 266 Ahmadis, a minority religious group, and sentenced more than a hundred to prison sentences. It is more than ever important that Algeria respects the international conventions it has signed, which guarantee freedom of religion and conscience and prohibit arbitrary interference by the state in people’s beliefs.