

**President of the Republic of Algeria**

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Your Excellency,

I am writing to raise concern about the deteriorating health condition of Algerian journalist **Merzoug Touati**, who has been on hunger strike since 29 March 2022 to protest against his transfer from Ghardaia prison to Al-Aghouat prison, 500 Km away from his residence in Bejaia, Algeria. He had previously been held in Ghardaia prison during his first instance and appeal trials. He was transferred to the new prison on 16 February 2022 and placed in a crowded transit area dedicated to new incoming prisoners who are supposed to stay there only for two weeks due to Covid-19 regulations. However, Merzoug Touati has already spent more than one month and a half in this transit area, placing his health at further risk.

On 9 April 2022, his family visited him in prison and reported that he had lost half his weight and was barely able to move. He complained of stomach pain and asked his family to get him medicine from outside prison, as the prison administration has not provided him with any medical attention needed and instead continued to disregard his hunger strike.

Police in Ghardaia summoned Merzoug Touati on 28 December 2021 without mentioning any reason. They kept him in custody for one night before transferring him to Ghardaia prison on 29 December 2021. The first instance court in Ghardaia sentenced him to one year in prison, confirmed on appeal, for “harming public institutions” and publishing “fake news”, under articles 146 and 196 bis of the penal code, respectively, after he posted on Facebook a comment denouncing the prison conditions of a detained activist.

**In light of the above, I urge you to quash the sentence against Merzoug Touati and release him immediately and unconditionally as he is imprisoned only for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is held in conditions meeting international standards and provided with the adequate medical treatment he may require, including during his hunger strike.**

Yours sincerely,