

WORKERS' AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK IN ALGERIA

Although Algeria has ratified most of the ILO Conventions, including Convention No. 87 on freedom of association and the right to organize in 1963, the exercise of trade union rights is constantly hampered by abuses from the administration, while the intimidation of trade unionists is common practice. The International Labour Organization, international trade union organizations and international human rights NGOs have repeatedly condemned these violations and called on the Algerian authorities to implement their commitments on trade union rights, in accordance with Algerian law and international conventions ratified by Algeria (see [more info](#)).

The **right to form trade unions** is regularly violated by the administration. While the law provides that the receipt acknowledging the creation of a union is to be issued within 30 days, the registration of several new independent trade unions in the public and private sectors, supported by SNAPAP, has been delayed for several months by the administration. In June 2013, SNAPAP and other unions have also declared the creation of the *Confédération Autonome des Travailleurs Algériens/CATA* (Autonomous Confederation of Algerian Workers), which, as other new confederations, has not been registered yet.

According to the law that governs trade union rights in Algeria, in order to be **representative** within a company, a union must represent at least 20% of the total number of employees of the company. However, it is up to the employer and the administration to determine their representativeness: in practice, this prevents unions from being recognized and denies their right to collective bargaining.

In such a context, the conditions imposed by law for the **organization of strikes** cannot be met. If a union which is not recognized by a company cannot gather the workers it represents, the organization of a secret ballot of the entire workforce as required by law cannot be organized. In addition, the very restrictive interpretation of the law 90-02 of 6 February 1990 allows the administrative authorities to regularly ban strikes on the basis of vague terms such as when it is "likely to cause a serious economic crisis". Justice is also based on the same restrictive interpretation to determine the legality of strikes in response to employers' complaints. Moreover, in case of conflict, the law gives the State the opportunity to refer the workplace dispute to the National Commission for arbitration even if the employer or workers' representatives have not requested it.

At the national level, although civil unrest is affecting all economic sectors, including areas where it is usually absent such as the justice sector, the Algerian authorities continue to refuse to recognize independent unions as social partners, and these continue **to be excluded from negotiations**.

Unions' offices and headquarters are not protected from **administrative closures, surveillance** and sometimes **police repression**. Individuals who rent their premises to trade union organizations are often the victims of pressure and threats to put an end to the lease. In February 2013, the *Maison des Syndicats* (Union House) was surrounded by police who banned the entry of participants to the 1st Forum for the fight against unemployment and precarious work, and prevented them from meeting. Members of the Tunisian, Moroccan and Mauritanian delegations were arrested and sent back to their home country by the police. In general, **freedom of association and assembly** is constantly hampered:

independent unions are systematically denied the authorization to hold such meetings or events, thus preventing any major union action.

Intimidation of trade unionists is another tool used by the Algerian authorities to reduce union action. The most active unionists are victims of threats, arbitrary dismissals and suspensions, judicial harassment, police violence, restrictions on freedom of movement, and most of the time appeals have no effects. Thus, the Algerian judicial authorities have not given any response to the complaint made by Rachid Malaoui following the attempt of sabotage of the brakes of his car, which could have killed him on 15 July 2011 when he was about to meet the Special Rapporteur for the right to housing of the United Nations. More recently, on 25 March 2013, on the eve of the World Social Forum (WSF) in Tunis, a delegation of 96 people, consisting of trade unionists from SNAPAP and activists from Algerian civil society associations, was arbitrarily prohibited from crossing borders to reach Tunisia. Therefore, all members of the delegation were prevented from participating in the WSF.

The interference of the Algerian authorities in the affairs of independent unions is such that they try to **clone autonomous unions** in order to challenge the legitimacy of the leadership which is considered to be too critical vis-à-vis the government and in order to increase divisions within the union movement. **Campaigns of slander and defamation** are also published in the press, targeting union leaders who are treated as "traitors" because of the international support they receive in order to delegitimize them vis-à-vis their members and to legitimize their repression.

The ***Syndicat National Autonome des Personnels de l'Administration Publique/SNAPAP*** (National Autonomous Union of Algerian Public Sector Workers) is a national trade union organization, which was created on 22 August 1990, and which has been registered by the Ministry of Labour. The SNAPAP's President is Mr Rachid Malaoui, and the General Secretary is Ms Nassira Ghozlane.

SNAPAP is active in all the branches of the public sector and administration. The union represents a space for dialogue, exchange and solidarity. It works in collaboration with all civil society organizations, social and union movements, at national or international levels, in the defense of trade union rights and freedom of association.

SNAPAP is autonomous in its running and independent from the government and political parties. Its mission is as follows:

- To defend the material and moral interests of public sector workers;
- To defend freedom of association;
- To promote union activism and culture;
- To educate public sector workers to defend their labour rights;
- To fight for the implementation of human rights and fundamental principles in all areas;
- To strengthen the fight against poverty and corruption, and the struggle for the protection of the national, regional and international environment.

SNAPAP is working to establish trade unionism based on:

- The struggle to improve social and working conditions;

- Trade union pluralism and autonomy (that accepts the plurality of opinions and recognizes the universal and individual right of freedom of opinion for all, based on the respect of union Constitution and policies);
- A multi-sectoral vision far removed from corporate interests;
- Mobilization, activism and negotiation, promoting greater unity amongst public sector workers, as well as democracy in the struggle facing public sector workers, based on democratic management;
- The struggle for equality of rights and against all forms of discrimination.

SNAPAP has helped workers to organize unions in the areas of production and trade, but they have not yet obtained their registration. SNAPAP formed a confederation with these unions (the CGATA), which is not yet legally recognized in Algeria.

In 2002, the engagement and strong participation of women in the union struggle led to the creation of SNAPAP Women's Committee, which has the mission of: inspiring women to become involved in the work of autonomous trade unionism, to encourage and affirm their role as women as full and equal citizens, to allow women to express themselves freely and emancipated, and to collaborate with civil society. The SNAPAP has also established a Young Workers' Committee, which is working towards protecting men and women young workers.