

28 March 2018

Morocco: Ongoing trial and detention of social and economic rights defenders

On 26 March 2018, the Court of First Instance in the city of Oujda in eastern Morocco postponed the trial of human rights defenders, **Amine Lamkallach**, **Aziz Boudchich** and **Mostafa Dainine**, along with eight other activists, to 2 April and ordered their detention pending trial in connection with their involvement and participation in a series of protests and sit-ins in the city of Jerada, north-eastern Morocco. Meanwhile, the detention of human rights defender **Tarik El-Wazna** who was arrested on 20 March continues pending investigation.

[Mostafa Dainine](#) and [Aziz Boudchich](#) are social and economic rights defenders and bloggers. [Amine Lamkallach](#) is a theatre artist and graduate of *Institut Supérieur D'Art Dramatique et D'Animation Culturelle*. The three human rights defenders are leading figures in the protest movement of the economically marginalised city of Jerada which demands social justice and economic opportunities for the city's inhabitants. [Tarik El-Wazna](#) is a photographer and member of the protest movement in Jerada. He works on the photographic documentation of the protests in Jerada.

Members of the security forces arrested Aziz Boudchich on 11 March. The following day, they arrested Mostafa Dainine and Amine Lamkallach separately in Jerada before transferring the defenders to the city of Oujda. The prosecutor in Oujda initially claimed that their arrest was connected with a traffic accident which occurred on 8 March 2018. However, their ensuing prosecution and trial involves other charges in connection with the protests in Jerada. The General Prosecutor charged them with 'insulting state employees', 'taking part in violent acts against members of the law enforcement', and 'disobedience, incitement and resisting state's orders through illegal gatherings.' They remain in detention in the local prison in the city of Oujda.

On 26 March 2018, the Court of First Instance in the city of Oujda in eastern Morocco postponed the trial of Aziz Boudchich, Mostafa Dainine and Amine Lamkallach to 2 April and rejected their lawyer's request to release them on bail. The trial started on 20 March at the Court of First Instance in Oujda. Tarik El-Wazna was arrested on 20 March and remains in detention pending investigation.

Protests in Jerada began on 22 December 2017 following the death of two young brothers in a coal mine. The protests increased in February following the death of a third young miner on 1 February in another coal mine. The Moroccan government shut down the coal mining industry in the city in 1998 without providing economic alternatives. As a result of the harsh living conditions and high unemployment rate following this decision, many inhabitants of Jerada, especially young men, have engaged in dangerous mining activities in abandoned coal mines. Protesters in Jerada urged the government to improve economic conditions and infrastructure in their city, demanding an economic alternative to the unsafe mining. For years, Moroccan authorities have tolerated the illegal and dangerous mining activity and disregarded long-standing complaints from the population regarding marginalisation, poverty, unemployment and lack of infrastructure and basic

services.

In response to the mobilisation of protesters via social media, the Minister of the Interior issued a ban on 13 March on unauthorised protests in the city. On 14 March security forces massively repressed the protests and the sit-in near the coal mines in Youssef Village and detained approximately 55 activists. Economic protests have increased in marginalised areas of Morocco since 2016 when the government began a package of free-market reforms and austerity measures, recommended by the International Monetary Fund, which included cutting subsidies.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of Amine Lamkallach, Aziz Boudchich, Mostafa Dainine and Tarik El-Wazna, which appears to be the result of their activities in the defence of social and economic rights in the city of Jerada and the exercise of their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:

1. Drop all charges and immediately cease all further harassment of Amine Lamkallach, Aziz Boudchich, Mostafa Dainine and Tarik El-Wazna;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Morocco and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.