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Communiqué

9th December, World Anti-Corruption Day with a focus on protecting whistleblowers and the victims of corruption.

Algiers, 9th December 2006. In October 2003, when the UN Convention against corruption (UNCAC) was adopted, the 9th December was made World Anti-Corruption Day and has been celebrated throughout the world from then. Today is the Convention's 3rd anniversary, on the eve of the first-ever session of the Conference of UNCAC member states being held in Jordan from the 10th to the 14th of December.

The Algerian Association for Fighting Corruption (AACC) has made the 9th December to draw attention to the need for protection of whistleblowers and victims of corruption. It is convinced, more so than ever, that the involvement of civilians and of civil society in the fight against corruption is essential. It is this involvement that is at present insufficient even if strongly encouraged by the UN corruption convention.

Unfortunately, Algerian law adopted on 20th February 2006 for the prevention and for the fighting of corruption – resulting from the government taking the vital step to introduce the UNCAC into domestic law – is insufficient when it comes to protecting whistleblowers. The law even discourages whistleblowing by excessively supporting the prosecution of those who make slanderous remarks! It's no coincidence that before the law was passed and even since, those who denounce corruption in Algeria must face systematic reprisals and all forms of intimidation.

On the 8th November 2006, Mr Bououni Achour, General Secretary of the National Union of Electricians and Electro-technicians Working in Aerial Security (SNESA), and a member of the AACC was arrested by three people in civilian clothes who did not identify themselves.

Mr Achour, who is also from the National Group for Aerial Navigation (ENNA), had made a complaint against a police squad after he had been robbed and beaten by security agents from ENNA. He was put in an unmarked van, thrown in a dungeon where he was kept without light 24 hours a day until 14th November. During this week-long period, he was subjected to forceful interviews and periods total solitude.

He was then taken in cuffs before a military tribunal in Blida where, pursuant to a complaint originating from the General Director of ENNA, a military prosecutor read out the charges against him: attempting to threaten the safety of the state; espionage for the benefit of foreign powers; and passing on military secrets. Mr Achour explained at length to the military prosecutor that his arrest was “a set up” in revenge for his allegations of embezzlement of public funds and bad management at the ENNA. After his statement, he was freed and was told by the magistrate -- after the verbal hearing -- that the military justice had “nothing to reproach him for” and that the file would be passed on to the civil justice for examination. The case was eventually dropped.

The Algerian Association for Fighting Corruption (AACC) denounces the arbitrary and illegal detention and imprisonment of Mr Bououni Achour and asks the highest authorities to set up a inquest into the matter. The AACC expresses its solidarity and support for him.

It is significant that a few days before his detention, Mr Achour had spoken at the AACC's annual conference on the 2nd and 3rd November 2006 about the ENNA's serious failings and mistakes that have been going on for many years without the intervention of authorities. These failings had been regularly signalled by executives, including Mr Bououni Achour, and these people had been subjected to systematic sackings amongst other reprisals.

A few days after the freeing of Mr Achour, ENNA's Director General was relieved of his duties. In this event, can one see there a recognition that his complaints were fair? It is time that ENNA reinstate those, such as Mr Achour, who have been subjected to sackings amongst other punishments. It is also time that light be shed on the management of ENNA, by, for example, an independent and impartial audit.

Through this dramatic and despicable example, which fortunately has had a positive ending, the AACC makes its appeal to the authorities that such smears and mistakes are not repeated, that the laws of the Republic be respected, especially with regards to justice, and that the legislation in place be reviewed so as to guarantee protection for whistleblowers and victims of corruption.

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