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Middle East/North Africa - Algeria

Censorship

New cases of media censorship in Algeria

27 April 2015

Reporters Without Borders is worried about the latest cases of censorship in Algeria, where the authorities obtained the suspension of a popular satirical TV programme, accusing it of "repeated excesses" and "attacking state symbols," and briefly arrested a cartoonist for "defaming and attacking the president."

The suspension of "Weekend," a satirical programme broadcast by *El Djazira TV* on Friday evenings, has triggered [outrage](#) on [social networks](#).

One of its journalists, **Abdou Semmar**, who is also the editor of *Algérie-Focus*, said the programme enraged the authorities by referring on 17 April to the Parisian apartments of several Algerian ministers and Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal's daughter.

The programme was nonetheless just based on information in "[Paris-Algiers, a passionate history](#)," a book by French journalists Marie-Christine Tabet and Christophe Dubois about the relationship between Algerian and French politicians. In the programme, Semmar questioned the wealth of Algeria's leaders as reflected in their Parisian apartments, the addresses of which he revealed.

The government's reactions were immediate and included an irate [phone call](#) from the prime minister. The Broadcasting Regulatory Authority summoned Weekend producer Karim Kardache the next day and gave him a verbal warning. It then issued a [public statement](#) accusing the programme of "sarcasm and mocking people including state symbols" and of breaches of professional ethics punishable under media and broadcasting laws.

Calls from the communication ministry maintained pressure on the programme's staff, who include the journalist Mustapha Kessaci and the comedian Merouane Boudiab. The TV station's management was asked to change its form and content and fire Semmar. The staff decided to resign from the programme after preparing a [final episode](#) broadcast on 24 April.

"We firmly condemn the censoring of this programme," Reporters Without Borders deputy programme director Virginie Dangles said. *"Journalists have a duty to criticize, question and comment on government decisions and practices, in order to encourage a public debate on issues that concern the entire population."*

"We call for this programme's immediate reinstatement and an end to the harassment of journalists who are just doing their job in the name of freedom of information and expression."

Asked by Reporters Without Borders about the programme's suspension, Dubois said it was "typical of the way this government operates with the media." While writing the book, Dubois tried unsuccessfully for more than a year to get a visa to go to Algeria to interview its leaders and civil society activists.

Journalists and activists are preparing to stage a [demonstration](#) on 1 May in support of the programme and to condemn censorship and repeated pressure on the media.

Cartoonist arrested

Police arrested the cartoonist **Tahar Dhejiche** in El Oued province (600 km southeast of the capital) on 20 April after he posted cartoons on Facebook about the problems associated with the use of fracking to extract gas from shale.

[One](#) of the cartoons was deemed to have insulted President Bouteflika by portraying him inside an hourglass that was collapsing under the sand of In Salah. The residents of this region have been [protesting](#) about shale gas exploration and production.

"We condemn this latest attempt to silence those who speak out in Algeria and we remind the authorities that cartoons are an essential part of freedom of expression and information."

Dhejiche's cartoons are well known for criticizing the government and supporting the opponents of shale gas production. His arrest recalls that of [Djamel Ghanem](#), a cartoonist who was facing 18 months in prison on the same charge under article 144b of the criminal code, which penalizes insulting the president. He avoided this fate thanks to a national and international campaign.

Algeria is ranked 119th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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