

# Algeria: Preparing for the Struggle Ahead

Thursday 25 June 2020, by [HAMOUCHE Hamza](#) (Date first published: 3 June 2020).

**The Algerian uprising embarked on its second year and despite the immense difficulties and challenges encountered in the first year, the movement has not disappeared. We are in a situation of relative equilibrium in the balance of forces on the ground.**

The Hirak could not topple the regime and the latter could not exhaust the movement. The Algerians mobilized in the Hirak are not giving up and refuse to endorse the dictatorship's democratic façade.

Due to the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the Hirak decided to halt its weekly protests and marches by mid-March 2020 after celebrating its first anniversary on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2020. In the first weeks of March, the protests continued, fueled by an unflinching desire to get rid of the regime as well as a deep mistrust in the authorities' calls on people to avoid big gatherings. However, wisdom prevailed and the popular movement temporarily discontinued its street actions on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2020. But the amazing energy and dynamic created by this magnificent uprising has not disappeared. In fact it metamorphosed into health campaigns and solidarity actions with the needy and most vulnerable in society during these difficult times. We have seen several initiatives of cleaning up and disinfecting public spaces, caravans of solidarity to Blida, which happens to be the epicentre of the pandemic in the country, campaigns to raise awareness about the disease and other creative actions to keep the Hirak's flame alive.

Meanwhile, the authoritarian and reactionary regime is redoubling its repression of journalists and activists. In total, dozens of protestors, political activists and journalists are currently in jail at the time of writing.

The regime hasn't stopped at this but is currently preparing a new penal code which will make it extremely difficult to criticise the authorities.

This draft law plans to stifle dissent further and wants to criminalise certain actions that are deemed to "undermine state security and national unity", accusations that have been levelled at many activists and journalists of the Hirak since June 2019.

Moreover, it continues to restrict online media by blocking access to sites like Radio M, Maghreb Emergent and Interlignes.

These times of confinement must be taken as a moment of collective reflection and learning about the achievements as well as the shortcomings and mistakes of the popular uprising. The system will not yield easily. For this reason, resistance must continue through acts of civil disobedience that will not endanger people's health and lives in the exceptional times of Covid-19, to force the regime to give way. There is no doubt that the Hirak will resume after this pandemic subsides, because the same conditions that gave rise to it are still present. The coronavirus crisis moreover reveals the dire state of the public health sector that has been hollowed out by decades of underfunding and mismanagement and now faces cuts as state revenues plummet with collapsing oil prices (currently at \$20 a barrel).

The Hirak must consolidate through encouraging local self-organisation in the workplaces, through neighbourhood committees, student and women's collectives, independent local representations and the opening up of more spaces for discussion, debate and reflection in order to have a solid platform or a coherent programme.

It must insist on individual and collective freedoms of expression and organise and campaign tirelessly for the release of all political prisoners.

And finally, it will have to connect social justice and socio-economic rights to democratic demands. Because if Algeria continues on this path of liberalisation and privatisation, we will definitely see more social explosions and discontent as a social consensus cannot be achieved while the resulting pauperisation, unemployment, and inequality continue. The recent slump in oil prices may just hammer the final nail in the coffin of a rentier system that is highly dependent on oil and gas exports for its survival.

In this context, Algerians must not dig their own graves by halting their revolution halfway.

The struggle for democratisation will be long and must go on.

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