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Environmental activist takes on Australian mining company operating in Algeria

Saturday 19 August 2023, by [PRICE Susan](#) (Date first published: 10 August 2023).

Algeria is being seriously affected by climate change, yet authorities have agreed to a dangerous new lead and zinc mine, a joint venture with South Australian based miner Terramin.

Professor Leila Bensmaine from the Algerian University of Science and Technology Houari Boumediene, writing in [assafirarabi.com](#) last November, said: “Whereas the global temperature rise in the twentieth century was 0.74°C, it was somewhere between 1.5°C and 2°C in the Maghreb, depending on the region; more than twice the global average rise.”

Due to its geographical location, Algeria is “one of the 24 hotspots that are highly vulnerable to climate change, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)”, Bensmaine said.

Moreover, the drop in rainfall “ranges between 10 and 20%”. This has led to depleted dams and badly impacts coastal aquifers and groundwater. In addition, “recurring periods of drought, which have become longer, have exacerbated desertification”.

These impacts are exacerbated as globalised neoliberalism is driving the intensive exploitation of natural and mineral resources, degrading the environment, affecting biodiversity and displacing local populations.

This is the context in which university lecturer Kamel Aissat is fighting to protect Algeria’s environment and challenging a zinc mining project that locals say will contaminate groundwater and displace communities.

South Australian-based mining company [Terramin](#) is involved in the joint venture to mine zinc and lead from the Tala Hamza mine, on Algeria’s Mediterranean Sea coast, 15 kilometres from the city of Béjaia.

According to [mining-technology.com](#): “[Tala Hamza] is owned by Western Mediterranean Zinc, a joint venture between Terramin and Algerian-based Enterprise Nationale des Produits Miniers Non-Ferreux et des Substances Utiles Spa”.

Terramin was given the green light on May 13 to develop its mining operation. It told the [Australian Stock Exchange](#) on May 18 that its mining permit means “that Tala Hamza has satisfied all Algerian regulatory, financial and environmental requirements”.

Terramin said together with its Algerian partners it plans to mine and process 2 million tonnes of zinc ore each year instead of the 1.3 million tonnes anticipated by the 2018 Tala Hamza Definitive Feasibility Study.

It said this indicates the project's "returns will be enhanced over the anticipated 20+ year mine life".

The mine's opponents say it will pose a danger to the population's health, threatens to displace entire villages, damage the region's flora and fauna and pollute groundwater and a protected Ramsar wetland.

Aissat was banned from leaving the country on July 15 and has been placed under judicial supervision and threatened with arrest. His supporters are proud of his "involvement in mobilising the local population against this dangerous project".

Opponents of the mine launched a petition weeks ago demanding that "public authorities comply with the law by consulting the population and carrying out an impact study on the environment and public health", said his supporters.

"Everything points to the fact that, if the Tala Hamza mine is developed, not only could several villages and their entire agricultural economy be wiped out, but also the huge water table in the soumame [Soummam] valley (estimated at over 1,600 billion m³), which would be contaminated. The serious consequences of such a scenario, if it were to occur, could even affect the sea and a number of economic activities in the wilaya [province] of Béjaïa, particularly the agri-food sector."

A campaign in solidarity with Aissat and the people of Tala Hamza, Amizour and Béjaïa is calling for the legal proceedings against him to be dropped and for an end to repression and intimidation and to respect freedom of expression.

SUSAN PRICE

P.S.

Green Left. 10 August 2023:

<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/algeria-environmental-activist-takes-australian-mining-company>