



COSYFOP

Trade Union Confederation of Productive Forces

Political and Trade Union Analysis

The Hidden Truth

A Critical Assessment of the 2025 Report of
the Arab Trade Union Confederation on Algeria



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I. Why Does This Document Matter?

The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) published its 2025 annual report on trade union rights and freedoms in the Arab region, including a chapter on Algeria entitled: “*A Law Reshaping Trade Unions to Fit the Authority’s Design.*” At first glance, the title suggests a critical assessment of the trade union situation in Algeria. Yet the substance of the report reveals shortcomings that go far beyond mere “professional limitations,” as they reflect the increasingly political role that ATUC now appears to play within the regional trade union landscape.

The Trade Union Confederation of Productive Forces (COSYFOP) publishes this analysis with a clear objective: to restore the factual record before international institutions, democratic trade union organisations, and defenders of trade union freedoms worldwide. This document seeks to demonstrate that the ATUC report does not accurately reflect the reality of the trade union movement in Algeria. Instead, it offers a diluted and partial portrayal of the situation — one that effectively shields the Algerian authorities while obscuring the reality faced by trade unionists who are prosecuted, imprisoned, or otherwise targeted because of their activism.

This is not merely a response to a report. The central issue concerns the consistency of ATUC’s own position. How can an organisation claim to defend independent trade unions while simultaneously excluding the only Algerian independent trade union organisation represented within its own structures and among its founding members? How can it remain silent about the imprisonment of trade unionists prosecuted under terrorism-related charges or punished for exercising the right to strike, while the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to which it is affiliated, presents the defence of the right to strike as a fundamental priority ?

II. The Reality of Trade Union Repression in Algeria

What is currently unfolding in Algeria cannot be reduced to a mere “legislative bottleneck” or to simple “procedural restrictions,” as suggested by the report. Rather, it reflects the gradual construction of an integrated system designed to securitise independent trade union activity. Within this framework, social protest, independent trade union organising, and the exercise of the right to strike — despite being protected under the Constitution and international conventions — are increasingly treated as threats to public order or national security, exposing trade unionists to serious criminal prosecution.

This system is built around four interconnected pillars:

- **The legislative framework**: Article 87 bis of the Penal Code and Law 23-02 governing the exercise of trade union rights;
- **The judicial apparatus**: terrorism-related prosecutions targeting peaceful trade unionists, judicial harassment, and heavy prison sentences;
- **The administrative apparatus**: prolonged judicial supervision measures, restrictions on freedom of expression, abusive dismissals, and administrative practices aimed at weakening independent trade union organisations;
- **The security apparatus**: arrests without warrants, enforced disappearances, torture, and the extraction of confessions under coercion.

III. Article 87 bis - The Most Dangerous Omission

Article 87 bis of the Algerian Penal Code is undoubtedly the most serious issue entirely omitted from the ATUC report, despite the fact that it has, in recent years, become one of the principal legal tools used to suppress trade union and civil liberties in Algeria.^[1]

The danger of this provision lies not only in the severity of the penalties it carries, but above all in its deliberately broad and vague wording, which allows the authorities to extend the definition of “terrorism” to entirely peaceful activities, including independent trade union activity, social mobilisation, and the exercise of fundamental freedoms. This provision was notably used to sentence trade unionist Ali Mammeri to ten years’ imprisonment because of his trade union activities.^[2]

Positions of United Nations and International Bodies

- **The UN Special Rapporteur** on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association explicitly called for the repeal of Article 87

bis, stressing its “broad and vague” nature and its use against individuals peacefully exercising their fundamental rights.^[3]

- **The ILO Committee of Experts** initiated a formal examination regarding the application of Article 87 bis following observations submitted by COSYFOP, and requested detailed clarifications from the Algerian government — an explicit international acknowledgment of a structural problem affecting trade union freedoms and human right.^[4]
- **In January 2025**, the European Parliament condemned the use of Article 87 bis against peaceful opponents and defenders of fundamental freedoms in Algeria.^[5]
- **Human Rights Watch** documented, in its 2025 World Report, the “inappropriate” use of Article 87 bis against human rights defenders and civil society actors.^[6]

In this context, the complete omission of Article 87 bis from the ATUC report cannot reasonably be dismissed as a simple editorial oversight or documentary gap. Any serious discussion of this provision would necessarily require examining the central role played by the security and judicial apparatus in controlling trade union and civic space in Algeria. Yet this is precisely the structural dimension the report deliberately avoids, limiting its analysis to a form of “controlled criticism” focused on administrative or procedural restrictions, without ever addressing the most sensitive repressive mechanisms of the Algerian system.

IV. The Ali Mammeri Case - Penal Repression in Practice

The case of Ali Mammeri, President of the National Union of Public Sector Employees in Culture and Arts (SNFC), affiliated with COSYFOP, is one of the clearest examples of the gradual shift in Algeria from administrative pressure on trade unions toward the direct criminalisation of independent trade union activity.^[7]

Documented Facts

- **19 March 2025:** Ali Mammeri was arrested at his workplace in Oum El Bouaghi without a judicial warrant.
- **19-23 March:** He was subjected to enforced disappearance for four days, while the authorities refused to inform his family or lawyers of his place of detention.
- **During detention:** He reported being repeatedly beaten and forced to strip naked in order to extract “confessions.” His torture complaint was never the subject of any effective investigation.

- **29 October 2025:** He was sentenced at first instance to fifteen years' imprisonment on "terrorism" charges under Article 87 bis, in addition to charges of "disclosing confidential information."
- **February 2026:** The conviction was upheld on appeal and reduced to ten years' imprisonment, accompanied by the deprivation of his civil and political rights. Amnesty International stated that the accusations in fact related to his communications with exiled trade unionists concerning violations of trade union rights.
- **Nineteen international organisations**, including Amnesty International, Public Services International (PSI), and the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), called for his immediate and unconditional release.^[8]

The omission of this case from the ATUC report - despite the fact that it had already received significant international attention before the report's publication - confirms that the objective was not to provide a genuine assessment of the trade union situation in Algeria, but rather to produce a diluted narrative confined to forms of criticism tolerated by the Algerian authorities.

V. CNAPEST - An Independent Union Under Siege

CNAPEST (the National Autonomous Council of Teaching Staff in the Secondary and Technical Education Sector) is one of Algeria's most prominent independent trade unions. Its complete omission from the ATUC report cannot reasonably be justified.

- **24 February 2025** - Secretary-General Messaoud Boudiba and his deputy, Boubekeur Habet, were arrested during a peaceful gathering in M'Sila.^[9]
- **Since February 2025** - Both leaders have been placed under strict judicial supervision, including mandatory reporting twice a week at locations situated hundreds of kilometres from their homes. They have also been prohibited from engaging in any public trade union activity or media communication.
- **9 March 2026** - The Ministry of Labour filed an official request before the administrative court seeking the dissolution of CNAPEST on the grounds that it had exercised the right to strike.^[10]
- Numerous members of CNAPEST's local structures have also faced imprisonment, dismissal, or prosecution linked to their trade union activities.

Describing such realities as mere “procedural restrictions” - or omitting them altogether, as the report does - goes beyond simple professional inadequacy. It contributes to downplaying the seriousness of attacks on trade union freedoms and to presenting a heavily diluted portrayal of the situation in Algeria.

VI. The Criminalisation of the Right to Strike - When ATUC Remains Silent About the Imprisonment of Trade Unionists Within Its Own Sphere

One of the report’s most revealing contradictions lies in its complete silence regarding the imprisonment, in 2025, of fourteen trade union officials from the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), including two national officials from the railway sector, following a spontaneous railway workers’ strike or the submission of a strike notice.^[11]

This silence is particularly significant for one obvious reason: UGTA is not merely an ordinary member of ATUC, but one of the organisations exercising considerable influence within its structures. Acknowledging the imprisonment of these trade union leaders would have required the report to recognise that the deterioration of trade union freedoms in Algeria no longer affects only independent unions, but now extends even to organisations historically aligned with the authorities and integrated into regional trade union structures themselves.

Such recognition would have seriously weakened the report’s underlying narrative, according to which trade union tensions in Algeria supposedly stem primarily from administrative disagreements or limited procedural constraints.

VII. ATUC and Its Own Contradiction - The Exclusion of the Only Algerian Independent Trade Union Confederation

The Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC), which claims in its report to support “trade union pluralism in the Arab region” and “the protection of independent trade unions,” has itself excluded the General Autonomous Confederation of Workers in Algeria (CGATA) — the only Algerian independent trade union organisation and a founding member of its own structures.^[12]

This contradiction becomes even more striking when one observes that several older solidarity articles concerning Algerian independent trade unions, previously published on the official ATUC website, are no longer accessible there, while they remain available on the unsecured staging version of the site.^[13]

Such a situation raises serious questions regarding the management of content related to Algerian independent trade unions, as well as the possible existence of an orientation aimed at progressively erasing from ATUC's official website its previous positions in support of Algerian independent trade unions.

This contradiction highlights the highly selective nature of the discourse promoted by ATUC: trade union independence appears acceptable only so long as it does not challenge existing political balances or evolve into genuinely critical positions. Once independent unions become a source of real political embarrassment for the authorities, references to trade union pluralism and trade union freedoms quickly give way to a logic of containment, silence, and institutional image management.

VIII. ATUC and Trade Union Violations - Between Controlled Criticism and Image Management

The significance of the ATUC report lies not only in what it says, but also in the political role it plays internationally.

These reports are likely to be reviewed by:

- The Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Conference (ILO);
- The United Nations Human Rights Committee and UN Special Rapporteurs responsible for fundamental freedoms;
- The European Union, the European Parliament, and European human rights mechanisms;
- Democratic international trade union confederations involved in international solidarity policies;
- International trade union federations, human rights organisations, and other actors within international civil society.

When such institutions receive reports that remain silent about ten-year prison sentences imposed on trade unionists, or that reduce the situation to mere "procedural restrictions," this contributes to easing international pressure on the Algerian authorities and portraying serious violations of trade union freedoms as little more than administrative or legal irregularities.

In this context, ATUC appears less as an organisation defending workers' rights than as a mechanism contributing to the international management of the image of regimes repeatedly accused of violating trade union freedoms.

IX. Comparative Table - What the Report States and What It Conceals

The table below compares the main claims made in the ATUC report with the facts established by documented sources, including UN mechanisms, international monitoring bodies, independent trade union organisations, and media outlets.

What the ATUC Report Claims	The Reality Documented by International Sources
"Procedural difficulties regarding registration" and "organisational restrictions"	Threat of judicial dissolution of CNAPEST - official request filed by the Ministry of Labour before the administrative court, March 2026
"Restrictions on the right to strike" and "requisition mechanisms"	Over 23 trade unionists imprisoned in 2025 for exercising the right to strike or participating in peaceful protest activities
No mention of the Ali Mammeri case	Sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for "terrorism" -19 international organisations, including Amnesty International, demand his immediate release [8]
No mention of CNAPEST	Two leaders under strict judicial supervision since February 2025 - prohibited from any public trade union activity or media communication [9]
No mention of Article 87 bis	The UN Special Rapporteur called for its repeal - the ILO Committee of Experts opened a formal examination on its application [3][4]
No mention of the imprisonment of UGTA trade union leaders	Case documented by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Algerian political actors and international organisations [11]
Claims to support trade union pluralism and independent trade unions	ATUC itself excluded the only independent Algerian trade union confederation from its own structures [12]

Recommendations of COSYFOP and Its Affiliated Independent Trade Unions

First - To International Democratic Trade Union Organisations and Global Union Federations

1. Do not treat ATUC reports as a neutral or authoritative source for assessing trade union freedoms across North Africa and the Middle East, given the clear conflict of interest involved and the absence of meaningful participation by the independent unions most exposed to repression.
2. Adopt a pluralistic approach to documenting trade union freedoms across the region, based on direct engagement with independent trade unions and grassroots organisations, rather than relying exclusively on reports produced by regional trade union structures tied to governments or constrained by political considerations.
3. Develop independent monitoring and documentation mechanisms across the region in order to produce more balanced reporting that more accurately reflects the reality of trade union freedoms and related violations.
4. Support the right of independent trade unions across North Africa and the Middle East to access international platforms directly, without their representation remaining confined within closed bureaucratic channels that fail to reflect the real diversity of trade union movements in the region.
5. Adopt clear and public positions regarding trade unionists imprisoned or prosecuted because of their peaceful activities, particularly Ali Mammeri, the leaders of CNAPEST, and trade unionists targeted for exercising the right to strike.

Second - To the International Labour Organization and Relevant United Nations Bodies

6. Ensure the direct participation of Algerian independent trade unions during the examination of reports concerning Algeria, without limiting assessments to governmental narratives or regional reports drafted without the effective involvement of independent trade union organisations.
7. Follow up on the examination initiated by the ILO Committee of Experts concerning Article 87 bis of the Algerian Penal Code, including an assessment of the extent to which anti-terrorism legislation is being used against independent trade union activity and peaceful human rights advocacy.
8. Call on the Algerian government to release all trade unionists imprisoned because of their peaceful activities and to end the use of criminal

- proceedings and judicial supervision measures as tools of pressure against independent trade unions.
9. Urge the Algerian authorities to halt all dissolution proceedings targeting independent trade unions, particularly CNAPEST, and to guarantee respect for the right to strike and trade union freedoms in accordance with ILO conventions.
 10. Encourage the establishment of direct consultation mechanisms between United Nations bodies and independent trade unions across North Africa and the Middle East, outside the monopolised systems of representation maintained by traditional bureaucratic trade union structures.

Third - To International and Regional Human Rights Organisations

11. Intensify the integration of issues related to independent trade unions and trade union freedoms into international human rights reporting on Algeria, given that the targeting of independent trade unionism is now part of a broader crisis affecting freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the right to peaceful assembly.
12. Support independent trade unions in directly conveying their testimonies and analyses to United Nations Special Rapporteurs, UN mechanisms, and international bodies responsible for monitoring human rights and trade union freedoms.
13. Strengthen coordination between human rights organisations and independent trade unions in order to document violations linked to trade union activity, including prosecutions, judicial supervision measures, and the use of anti-terrorism legislation against trade unionists and human rights defenders.
14. Mobilise all available mechanisms — legal, diplomatic, media, and advocacy-related — to protect the independent trade union movement across North Africa and the Middle East against the continued erosion of trade union and civic freedoms.

Fourth - To Independent and Democratic Trade Unions of the Region

15. Work toward establishing independent coordination spaces among democratic trade unions across North Africa and the Middle East, based on grassroots solidarity, joint documentation of violations, and openness toward human rights organisations and social movements.
16. Develop independent parallel reports on trade union freedoms based on field documentation, direct testimonies, and legal analysis, in order to challenge the monopoly of official narratives and dominant regional representations.

17. Strengthen international advocacy and independent communication capacities so that the cases of trade unionists and workers do not remain dependent on selective regional narratives or political considerations.
18. Work toward building a democratic and independent regional trade union framework that genuinely represents the interests of workers and free trade unions, founded on the principles of trade union freedom, independence, transparency, and effective solidarity.
19. Consider the struggle for trade union freedoms as a two-dimensional struggle: on the one hand, against direct repression exercised by certain governments; and on the other, against the discourses and structures that contribute to reproducing that repression or minimising its seriousness before international institutions.

Conclusion

Trade unionists are currently imprisoned in Algeria because of their peaceful activities. Independent trade unions are facing judicial dissolution proceedings for exercising the right to strike. Trade union leaders are forced to travel hundreds of kilometres each week to report before judicial authorities under restrictive judicial supervision measures. This is the reality documented by international sources — and it is precisely this reality that ATUC has chosen to conceal.

The struggle for trade union freedoms across North Africa and the Middle East no longer consists solely in confronting the direct repression exercised by certain governments. It also requires confronting the structures and discourses that contribute to softening that repression, reframing it in diluted diplomatic language, or reducing its political significance before international institutions.

In this context, the international trade union movement bears a crucial responsibility: to distinguish between actors who genuinely document violations and those who participate in managing their political and media consequences. For its part, COSYFOP considers it its duty to speak with clarity, independence, and without political compromise.

Notes and References

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[13] **Arab Trade Union Confederation (ATUC)**, "Algerian Independent Trade Unions Protest Against the Draft Law on the Exercise of Trade Union Rights" — staging.arabtradeunion.org, **accessed 22 May 2026**

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