

# Algeria PM slams reported ransoms to 'terror groups'

Author:

Wed, 2020-12-09 01:40

ALGIERS: Algeria's prime minister has sounded the alarm over reported ransoms paid to "terrorist groups" for the freeing of hostages, weeks after the liberation of a French aid worker in Mali.

"Algeria notes, with great concern, continued transfers to terrorist groups of huge sums of money as ransoms to free hostages," Abdelaziz Djerad told African leaders at a summit of African Union heads of government.

This approach "undermines our counterterrorism efforts," he said, quoted by Algerian media.

His comments came after Mali released some 200 prisoners in October ahead of the release of four hostages including French aid worker Sophie Petronin.

One of the released prisoners, a terror suspect later arrested in Algeria, said in a video broadcast on Algerian TV that France had been involved in talks with Bamako and a key Malian extremist leader linked with Al-Qaeda.

Mustapha Derrar said he had heard that 207 prisoners would be released along with the payment of a ransom, adding that he had heard the figures €10 million and €30 million.

It was not possible to verify his claims or the conditions under which he made the statement.

In November, Algeria's defense minister said a "large ransom" had been paid to "terrorist groups in exchange for the release of three hostages," adding that such payments violated UN resolutions.

Djerad on Monday called for "concerted action to eradicate violent extremism, combat terrorism and dry up the sources of its funding."

France has consistently denied involvement in negotiations for the release of the hostages or having paid a ransom for Petronin's freedom.

On Oct. 12, French Prime Minister Jean Castex said the terrorists' release of Petronin was a "humanitarian gesture," saying "we were not part of these negotiations."

Rumors of ransoms paid for the release of western hostages in the Sahel region are common but rarely confirmed.

Djerad's statement comes amid Algeria's latest diplomatic fallout with its former colonial occupier, which has said it is considering reducing the number of visas it grants to countries that refuse to take back nationals illegally in the country or suspected of being radicalized.



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Algeria president to return 'within days' from German hospital  
French minister in Algeria praises 'cooperation' against extremism

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## [Houthis face 'torture' claims over refusal to treat journalist](#)

Author:

Wed, 2020-12-09 00:03

AL-MUKALLA: Local and international right groups have joined Yemeni officials in accusing the Iran-backed Houthis of putting the life of an abducted journalist at risk by denying him lifesaving medication.

Amnesty International said on Monday that Tawfiq Al-Mansouri, a Yemeni reporter abducted in Sanaa along with nine other journalists in 2015, is facing worsening health problems because the militia refuses to provide him with essential treatment.

Lynn Maalouf, the global rights group's deputy regional director for the Middle East and North Africa, described the denial of urgent medical aid for Al-Mansouri as "an act of cruelty that violates (international) bans on torture and other ill-treatment."

She said that the journalist is suffering from diabetes, kidney failure, heart problems, prostate inflammation and asthma.

“More recently we received worrying information that he contracted COVID-19 in June, and that since October his health has further deteriorated since he is being denied crucial treatment for his heart problems,” Maalouf said.

Al-Mansouri was one of four journalists sentenced to death by a Houthi-controlled court in Sanaa in June following accusations of colluding with the Arab coalition and Yemen’s internationally recognized government.

Five journalists were released during the latest major prisoner swap between the rebels and the government in October

Amnesty International demanded the Houthis provide Al-Mansouri with the necessary drugs and treatment, overturn his death sentence and release him.

Abductees’ Mothers Association, a Yemeni rights group that advocates for releasing war prisoners, said in a statement that the Houthis are also refusing to allow Al-Mansouri’s family to visit him.

Family members told the organization that he had contracted new diseases in detention and his health is deteriorating.

In the central province of Marib, the five journalists freed by the Houthis said that conditions endured by their four colleagues are growing worse as their captors subject them to intensifying psychological and physical torture.

The journalists urged the international community to pressure the Houthis to release the four prisoners.

In a letter to Maeen Sharim, deputy UN envoy to Yemen, the head of the Yemeni government delegation in prisoner swap talks, Hadi Al-Haej, said that the Houthis risk killing the Yemeni journalist by depriving him of vital drugs and preventing his family from visiting him.

Al-Haej urged the UN Yemen envoy’s office to push for the release of the abducted journalists.

Western envoys to Yemen also joined in calls for the journalists to be freed.

“We call for the urgent release of journalist Tawfiq Al-Mansouri in view of a deteriorating health condition that is threatening his life” the British ambassador to Yemen, Michael Aron, said last week.

The Yemeni government said that the Houthis should be punished for aggravating the suffering of Yemenis and carrying out human rights abuses against their opponents by designating them as a terrorist organization.

Yemen’s Vice President Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar on Sunday hailed US moves to label the Houthis as a terrorist organization.

He urged David Shanker, the US Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, to accelerate the process in response to “public, political and legal demands” for the Houthis to be punished.



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US announces terror sanctions against Iran's 'ambassador' to Houthis in Yemen  
Houthis launch drone towards Saudi Arabia

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## [Anti-tank missile in Libya looks like Iran-produced weapon – UN](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1607460536766638400

Tue, 2020-12-08 19:09

NEW YORK: A United Nations analysis of photos of four anti-tank guided missiles in Libya found that one “had characteristics consistent with the Iranian-produced Dehlavieh” missile, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres reported to the Security Council.

However, he said in his biannual report – submitted to the council late Monday – that the UN secretariat was “unable to ascertain if this anti-tank guided missile had been transferred to Libya” in violation of Security Council sanctions on Iran.

The 15-member council banned weapons exports by Iran in 2007. Under a 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and key global powers, which is enshrined in a Security Council resolution, the arms restrictions were lifted in October this year.

Israel accused Iran of violating sanctions and submitted photos of the anti-tank guided missiles in Libya to Guterres in May. Just weeks later, Iran wrote to Guterres and “categorically rejected” the Israeli claims as “totally baseless.”

Israel said the photos surfaced in November 2019 and that the weapons were being used by militias linked to Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA), which has been fighting the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

“Based on the Secretariat’s analysis of the photographs provided, the Secretariat established that one of the four anti-tank guided missiles had characteristics consistent with the Iranian-produced Dehlahieh, though no production date for this anti-tank guided missile was visible,” Guterres’ report said.

“The Secretariat is unable to ascertain if this anti-tank guided missile had been transferred to Libya in a manner inconsistent with resolution 2231 (2015),” the report said.

Guterres reports twice a year to the Security Council on the implementation of the 2015 resolution.

Libya has also been subjected to a UN arms embargo since 2011. Independent UN experts report separately to the Security Council on the implementation of those measures.

Guterres also told the council that – based on photographic analysis – 476,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition, seized by Australian forces in June 2019 in international waters off the Gulf of Oman, did not appear to have been manufactured by Iran.



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Eastern Libyan forces intercept Turkish ship  
UN: 20,000 foreign fighters in Libya are a 'serious crisis'

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## [Iran says some of those involved in killing nuclear scientist arrested](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1607458269566366700

Tue, 2020-12-08 19:19

DUBAI: Some of those involved in the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist last month have been arrested, an adviser to the Iranian parliament speaker said on Tuesday, according to the semi-official news agency ISNA. Iran has blamed Israel for the Nov. 27 killing of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, who was

seen by Western intelligence services as the mastermind of a covert Iranian nuclear weapons program. Tehran has long denied any such ambition. Israel has neither confirmed nor denied responsibility for the killing.

"The perpetrators of this assassination, some of whom have been identified and even arrested by the security services, will not escape justice," ISNA quoted adviser Hossein Amir-Abdollahian as telling Iran's Arabic-language Al Alam TV.

"Were the Zionists (Israel) able to do this alone and without the cooperation of, for example, the American (intelligence) service or another service? They certainly could not do that," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Iran has given contradictory details of Fakhrizadeh's death in a daytime Nov. 27 ambush on his car on a highway near the capital Tehran.

A senior Revolutionary Guards commander has said the killing was carried out remotely with artificial intelligence and a machine gun equipped with a "satellite-controlled smart system."

Witnesses earlier told state television that a truck had exploded before a group of gunmen opened fire on Fakhrizadeh's car.

Experts and officials told Reuters last week that Fakhrizadeh's killing exposed security gaps that suggest Iran's security forces may have been infiltrated and that the Islamic Republic is vulnerable to further attacks.



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Iran says scientist killed in 'complex' operation, opposition rejects

involvement as 'lies' Iran to give a 'calculated' response to nuclear scientist killing, says official

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## [UK writer Neil Gaiman teams up with UNHCR to raise money for Syrian refugees](#)

Tue, 2020-12-08 21:16

LONDON: British writer Neil Gaiman has launched a new video campaign with the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to help raise funds for Syrian refugees, as part of the commission's Winter Appeal.

Introducing the wonderful new animated film of "What You Need to be Warm" including many of your [#DrawForRefugees](#) illustrations. Thanks for joining me on this journey.

RT this Tweet to hear more from me & UNHCR on how you can help [@refugees](#) this winter <https://t.co/gu2Q7GS0Sh>  
[pic.twitter.com/w1RClzwexM](https://pic.twitter.com/w1RClzwexM)

– Neil Gaiman (@neilhimsel) [December 8, 2020](#)

Gaiman, a UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador since 2017, released the video, featuring



him reading a poem he wrote called "What You Need to Be Warm." The poem draws attention to the plight of refugees, as animations in the video, created by more than 900 people, from artists to schoolchildren, depict the hardships many face.

The appeal will mainly try to raise funds for Syrians in Lebanon. Gaiman told the Independent that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) had worsened the situation for many refugees, especially those in the Middle East facing a difficult winter.

"It's very easy when you are dealing with your own nightmares and your own problems – and all of us are dealing with them through 2020 – to forget that there are people out there who have less than you and who need help and who are now having to cope with things like COVID in camps," he said.



One of the artworks submitted for the video. (UNHCR/Helena BS)

"I think this is, in a lot of ways, the hardest time of all. That was why I loved the idea of us taking the poem I wrote about warmth ... and going 'okay, well, we did a thing about the cold and winter and refugees and this year, it's worse'," he added.

"It's not like any of that is better than it was in winter of 2019. Everything now is 10 times worse, 50 times worse, 100 times worse. So, let's see what we can do to fix it or at least improve it in some way."

Gaiman first traveled to the region to raise awareness of the issues faced by refugees in 2014. "I've been banging the drum now for refugees for seven years or more," he said.

"I wound up going in 2014 to Jordan and seeing the camps up close and ... talking to refugees and that was life-changing. I came away, there are photos of me coming away from there with this sort of thousand-yard stare. I just

realised for myself how incredibly fragile civilisation is.



Neil Gaiman at work on the video for 'What You Need to Be Warm' at his home on the Isle of Skye, Scotland. (UNHCR/Jim Petersen)

"These were people from towns, cities and villages who had completely normal lives a year ago, two years ago, four years ago, they had corner shops. They were working selling cars, selling insurance, they were dentists. Everything was normal and then the world fell apart," he said.

UNHCR spokesperson Lisa Abou Khaled told the Independent that Syrian refugees in Lebanon faced their most difficult winter since fleeing their war-torn homeland, with their temporary shelter undergoing serious social, political and economic issues of its own, not to mention suffering a devastating explosion at the port of Beirut earlier this year.

"On top of the economic crisis, COVID-19 has obviously had a huge impact on the ability of refugees to find work because most of them were working or finding daily labour opportunities and unfortunately, most of them have lost those opportunities during lockdowns and as other confinement measures were taken," she said.

"Like everyone affected by the explosion, some refugees were living in some of the poorest neighbourhoods affected by the blast and its impacts and will now be exposed to the winter elements.

"The level of depression, attempted suicide and self-harm amongst refugees has increased dramatically in the past few months in Lebanon. We're aiming to reach 90 percent of Syrian refugees with support with the winter cash program. It's a lump sum that will help them buy fuel, warm clothes and basically survive this winter," Abdou Khaled added. "This is considered to be a lifesaving program ... but we still don't have enough money to reach that 90

percent of refugees.”

Gaiman added that people viewing the video should “remember how lucky you are to be warm and remember that there are people out there who aren’t. Just think of what it’s like in the bleak mid-winter for refugees all over the world. Think of them shivering and then reach into your pocket and send something.”



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Friends or foes? Syrian refugees divided on fate of defectors  
Russia-backed conference on Syrian refugees dismissed as ‘dog and pony show’