

Human Rights, Inequality and Social Justice, Peace

## **Idriss Jazairy – defender of the under privileged**

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**The world has lost a champion of human rights with the passing of Idriss Jazairy, a former Algerian diplomat and head of multi-lateral institutions who won praise for his work defending the under privileged and his commitment to international law.**

**The Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue reported the death on February 27, 2020 of its former executive director, commending his “remarkable intelligence” and great service.**

On the international stage Jazairy could be blunt and incisive, just as he was at ease as the aristocratic diplomat. In his last post as the Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council on unilateral coercive measures, Jazairy excoriated the United States for the “illegitimacy” of its actions in unilaterally withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and imposing sanctions on the Islamic Republic. Only last year he also raised his strong concerns over US sanctions on Venezuela.

And in an interview with IPS Inter Press Service in October, 2017, the former ambassador lambasted all members of the Human Rights Council for failing to respond to his request to convene a special session on the plight of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya being driven out of Myanmar into Bangladesh. “My multilateral faith in human rights is being undermined,” he said at the time.

As the twice-elected president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a United Nations specialized agency, he was known as a tough but fair task master who expected his staff to emulate his dedication. Former colleagues recall his brilliance and mastery of English, Arabic and French and how he lived modestly despite being a direct descendant of the Emir of Algeria, Abdelkader al-Jazairi (1808-1883). He would even call the guards at IFAD late in the evening to turn the lights off in the entire building when he was returning home at night after a long day at work.

Poverty among rural women was brought to the fore under his leadership at IFAD which led a summit on Economic Advancement of Rural Women and resulted in a UN General Assembly resolution in 1992. Newsweek magazine made Rural Women its cover story on this occasion. As president of IFAD, elected for the first time in 1984, he co-authored the first UN report on rural poverty: The State of World Rural Poverty: An Inquiry into its Causes and Consequences.

Jazairy was a graduate of Queen’s College Oxford and studied international leadership at France’s École Nationale d’Administration and the Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University. He was advisor to Algerian president Houari Boumediene for seven years and later served as Algeria’s ambassador to Belgium, the US, the Holy See, and Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Geneva. As a representative of Algeria, he played a constructive role as a founding member of UNCTAD and the Human Rights Council. In 2010 he was president of the council of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and also became executive director of ACORD, an international consortium of NGOs focused on the protection and empowerment of victims of poverty and civil strife in Africa. From 1995 to 1998, he was also a member of the board of CARE/USA.

As noted by the European Centre for Peace and Development with which he was closely associated, Jazairy worked tirelessly against exclusion and marginalization of people, xenophobia, bigotry and racism. He spoke about proliferation of crises and conflict that have the potential to divide societies and foster hatred, intolerance and animosity between peoples regardless of cultural and religious origins. Speaking at “A New Human Concept of Security” conference in Belgrade in 2018, Jazairy spoke forcefully about the rise of violent extremism and militant forms of nationalism and populism and how they threaten multicultural societies.

“We live in troubled and uncertain times,” he said. “Our era is defined by an environment of tension and division. It is compounded by the manipulation and hijacking of religions, creeds and value systems. For what purpose? For accessing power through violence in some parts of the world or through counter-factual political scheming in other parts.”

### **Annex : The testimony of his widow, Homeyra Jazairy**

Living with my husband Idriss Jazairy has turned my life upside down: When you get close to a human being of this caliber, you realize that the world is not as big as you think. Humans contain all the most beautiful traits that humanity conceals within them.

Our common life resembled a learned and joyful disorder with intense, committed, passionate, exhilarating, exhausting and nourishing tones.

From among all his life experiences, I chose to share one of the hundreds of testimonies I collected, that of his time at Queen’s College, Oxford:

*“These three years of life learning, self-awareness, the realization of his personality, the refinement of the balance which makes up an individual’s moral and spiritual architecture, the opening towards that which is universal, the sharpening of the appetite for knowledge, the challenging of preconceived ideas, the development of critical thinking, were the fireworks of creativity, as well as the conscience of his surroundings! Fireworks because of the simultaneity and succession of new perspectives, new explosions of knowledge, with the difference that pyrotechnics is followed by darkness, whereas the pyrotechnics of the mind is the harbinger of sustainable access in the Enlightenment. “*

As for his filiation with Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi , he strongly affirmed that the authentic descendants of the Emir are those who share the faith, values and love of his country, Algeria, with the same openness around the World.

I took a moment, throughout our marriage, to thank him for everything he did for others, for all the authentic love with which he flooded me, for his kindness, for his simplicity, for his protection. Each of the humans who got close to him, if only for a brief moment, were left with an impression, an anecdote, a feeling of having approached a Prince, a Lord, a good man, as good as they come, every century, in small numbers. *Homeyra Jazairy*

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