



## **PROFILE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT : ALGERIA**

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## PROFILE SUMMARY

*[It should be noted that very little information about internal displacement in Algeria is currently available. Problems of access continue to hinder the work of national and international human rights and humanitarian organizations.*

*The objective of the present summary is, therefore, to highlight the on-going situation of generalized violence in Algeria and to encourage governments, organizations and individuals to look more closely at the question of internal displacement in the Algerian context.]*

Seized by political turmoil for the last eight years, Algeria stands today as the most violent country in the Middle East and North Africa (HRW 2000). Over the last decade, hundreds of thousands of Algerians have been forced to flee armed attacks, massacres and large-scale human rights abuses. The precise number of Algerians displaced by the political violence is impossible to assess given the "information void" that has pervaded the conflict in Algeria since its onset. This said, some estimates have been published. U.S. Committee for Refugees noted in its World Refugee Survey 2000 that hundreds of thousands of Algerians were thought to have fled to Europe by the end of 1999; another 100,000 to 200,000 were believed to be displaced within the country (USCR 2000, p. 62).

The current violence in Algeria was triggered by an army-backed coup in 1991 that blocked the electoral victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) over the National Liberation Front (FLN), the political heir of the Algerian revolution (RIIA June 1998). In response, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), an armed group affiliated with the FIS, launched an armed campaign meant to bring down the new government (USCR 2000). Thousands of Algerians supported the opposition campaign against the new regime, and violence quickly spread throughout the country (Joffé June 1998).

The violence reached the status of civil conflict between 1992 and 1998 as fighting intensified between the military-backed regime and an armed opposition composed of a number of growing, sometimes conflicting, clandestine groups (ICG 2000). During the height of the crisis, some 1,200 persons reportedly were killed per month in Algeria, victim to barbarous massacres, indiscriminate armed attacks and assassinations (ICG 20 October 2000, Executive Summary). Another 4,000 persons are documented to have "disappeared" during this period (HRW 2000, Human Rights Developments). Women were often the most vulnerable targets of ruthless violence. During the course of attacks, women were reportedly abducted, enslaved, raped and later executed (HRW 2000). The region south of Algiers on the Blida plain was the site of some of the most heinous crimes against civilian populations and was, thus, termed the "triangle of death" (Dammers 1998).

Since the darkest days of the conflict, the situation in Algeria has improved, albeit not to the level observers might have hoped. Although the AIS has generally respected a cease-

fire since 1997 and security has returned to the larger metropolitan centres, killings and the violation of human rights continue unabated and unpunished in rural areas (HRW 2000). The election of Abdelazis Bouteflika as president in 1999 raised hopes that the violence would diminish and that justice would be served for past violations. However, aside from an unprecedented official admission that some 100,000 persons have been killed as a result of Algeria's civil strife, President Bouteflika's government has made little effort to bring justice to the thousands of victims of the Algerian conflict (HRW 2000; AI 21 November 2000). Perpetrators of crimes, both members of government security forces and armed groups, continue to enjoy impunity in the face of the most criminal actions (AI 21 November 2000).

The latest reports indicate that violence in the country is once again on the rise (ICG 20 October 2000). Official estimates indicate that some 300 persons are killed per month in Algeria though actual figures may be much higher (ICG 20 October 2000, sect. IIA). Many other persons are arbitrarily arrested and allegedly tortured whilst in detention. The Islamic Armed Group (GIA), notorious for its brutality, is said to be responsible for the bulk of the current violence (HRW 2000). However, government security forces are also to blame for direct abuses of human rights as well as the repeated failure to protect civilians from attack (HRW 1999; Cohen 6 December 1999).

As for the thousands of Algerians affected by the situation of violence and large-scale human rights abuses, little is known. Throughout the whole of the conflict, the Algerian government has heavily restricted and often censored information about human rights conditions (HRW 2000). For years, all major international human rights organizations have been prohibited from visiting the country. Though some agencies were finally permitted entry this year, the visit of the International Federation of Human Rights, for one, was reportedly conducted under conditions of strict surveillance (FIDH July 2000). The Algerian government continues to refuse visits by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and UN rapporteurs (HRW 2000; HRW August 1998). At the same time, the few human rights NGOs working in Algeria itself face continual obstacles and restrictions in the conduct of their work (AI 8 November 2000).

Due to the long-standing problems of access, nearly no information is available about internally displaced persons. In 1998, there were indications that persons were being displaced from Médéa, Blida, Ouled Allel and other towns south of Algiers (Dammers 1998). However, today even rough data such as this is no longer readily available. It is vaguely reported that the most recent movements of displaced persons are from vulnerable rural areas to the relative safety of metropolitan centres, that the displaced live with family and friends and not in camps or shelters, and that the level of actual population displacement is today far lower than in previous years (undisclosed source December 2000). Whether the displaced wish to return home or not is impossible to discern. These individuals remain "invisible" in a security situation that does not permit for real choices about voluntary return.

Overall, international reaction to the situation in Algeria has been one of cautious observation. For the most part, Europe has kept its distance, avoiding involvement or the

use of influence to direct events within Algeria (ICG 20 October 2000). The US has made intermittent public expressions of concern about the human rights situation, while at the same time, remaining steadfastly committed to doing business in Algeria (HRW 2000). Certainly, UN and bilateral condemnations of violence came following the large-scale massacres of late 1997 and 1998 (Dammers 1998). However, external support since that time has been markedly absent as the international community detachedly surveys the actions of the new Bouteflika government.

18 December 2000

# CAUSES AND BACKGROUND OF DISPLACEMENT

## Causes of displacement

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### **Government responsible for violence that causes displacement (1999)**

- Government played role in triggering violence in 1991
- Security forces have frequently failed to intervene to stop civilian attacks

"In Algeria too, the government exclusively blames terrorists for the violence that causes displacement. It conveniently overlooks the impact of its own role in cancelling the 1992 election that the Islamic Salvation Front was expected to win. Moreover, its failure to protect its own population from the massacres and violence that ensued became a major cause of internal flight.

[...]

The fact that the army and security forces have frequently failed to intervene to stop the attacks on civilians (up to 100,000 have reportedly been killed) has led some to believe that members of the security forces are directly involved with the armed groups. Government land appropriation schemes, about which little is known, have also been cited as a cause of displacement." (Cohen in FMR 6 December 1999, Introduction and Algeria: the information void)

### **Thousands of persons displaced from "triangle of death" at height of crisis (1998)**

- "Triangle of death" south of Algiers site of massive violence and abuses
- Land appropriation by army often followed attacks of shanty towns in this region

"Displacement caused by fear of attack would be still greater if the timing and location of massacres were predictable. Displacement has been greatest from some of the worst affected areas, notably the 'triangle of death' on the Blida plain south of Algiers, a region including villages and shanty towns politically hostile to the government, and from which migration to Algiers has been significant. Some reports have claimed that displacement, eventually to be followed by land appropriation by officials or army officers, may even be a motive for the atrocities. Bulldozing of shanty towns has also reportedly displaced thousands." (Dammers 1998, p. 180)

"Violence sharply escalated in the mid-1990s as massacres intensified in the so-called 'triangle of death' located south of the capital, Algiers. Insurgents typically slit the throats of their victims. Many victims were residents of remote villages. Government counterinsurgency tactics also caused many deaths, according to analysts." (USCR 2000, p. 62)

## **Background of the conflict (independence through 1998)**

### **Factional conflict has been driving force in Algerian politics since independence (1962-2000)**

- Power struggles between national factions began immediately after independence
- Political violence spiraled out of control by 1991
- Violence reached status of civil war between 1992 and 1998

"The first municipal and provincial elections held in 1990 were won by the Front islamique du salut (FIS), an Islamic party, while the Front de liberation national (FLN), previously the ruling party, obtained only 28 per cent of the votes. In December 1991, the FIS obtained 47 per cent of the votes in the first round of the first free parliamentary elections held since independence in 1962. Shocked by this result, the military subsequently cancelled the second round of the elections and arrested thousands of FIS supporters and their leaders.

[...]

Although observers disagree in their analyses about the causes of the outbreak of hostilities or place differing emphases on particular factors, the main reason for the conflict can perhaps best be summarised by pointing out the deficiencies of political institutionalisation since 1962. In the words of one observer, Hugh Roberts, post-independence Algeria has been marked by the fact that the 'formal distribution' of political responsibility does not correspond to the actual distribution of power.

The failure of state-building had its roots in the political set-up which emerged immediately after independence when the historical leadership of the resistance against French colonial rule was outmanoeuvred by the military. The latter formed a coalition with state bureaucrats and the remains of the FLN which became Algeria's sole political party. Rampant corruption and conflicts between different clans rendered state institutions practically dysfunctional, contributing to the failure of development policies. This problem became particularly acute with the fall in gas- and oil prices in 1986 as hydrocarbons accounted for 57 per cent of government revenues. The collapse of the oil price and ineffective measures to remedy the crisis caused a dramatic fall in living standards, increasing unemployment (it was estimated that by 1990, seventy per cent of the labour force under thirty years was out of work), and shortages in adequate and affordable housing. A package of economic reform policies to relieve the state's debt burden, initiated in collaboration with the IMF in 1989, disproportionately hit the poor and exacerbated the atmosphere of general crisis. In these circumstances, another issue that was left unresolved by the country's ruling coalition, the role of Islam, gained political significance.

Islam had played an important factor in the struggle for independence against the French as witnessed by the close relationship between the FLN and the Association of Reformist Ulama, a grouping of Muslim clerics founded in 1931. Following independence, the FLN disassociated itself from this Islamic-nationalist current and began advocating a largely

secularist and 'socialist' state ideology. When the revolutionary legitimacy of the ruling elite began to fade, many began to feel alienated from the political system. The slowly emerging fault line between a secularist elite and under-privileged groups was accentuated by a school and university system that, in terms of job opportunities and social status, privileged those educated in French and deprived others who were educated in Arabic from real prospects of social mobility.

In the late 1980s, the FIS effectively capitalised on all of these different sources of discontent with the regime. Operating a network of mosques and Islamic centres, the FIS also increased its popularity by providing an alternative to cash-starved state institutions in offering social services. However, the rising power of the FIS, and symbolic concessions made by the regime such as the Arabisation of the education system, alarmed the Berber minority that forms about 20 to 25 per cent of the total population and is concentrated in the Kabylia region. Berber political and cultural organisations have subsequently stepped up their campaigns for the recognition of their main language, Tamazight, and opposed the Islamic movement that has explicitly linked its drive for Islamisation to further Arabisation." (EPCPT October 1999, Introduction)

"Algeria finally won its struggle to achieve independence from France on 5 July 1962 after a bloody war that lasted more than seven years. In the ensuing disorder the country immediately faced a power struggle between the various nationalist factions. Indeed, the ceasefire had hardly been declared before the provisional government under Benyoucef Benkhedda was challenged by the leadership of the 'frontier army' headed by Colonel Houari Boumédiène. Although the military were the victors in this 'fratricidal' confrontation that cost the lives of thousands, they put a civilian, Ahmed Ben Bella, in charge of the government. This inaugurated the practice of government by shadow figures working in the background. It was also the beginning of an anti-democratic and multi-faceted regime that has succeeded in adapting to the various-and sometimes dramatic-upheavals that have shaken the country.

After aborted elections in December 1991, the country was caught up in a spiral of instability and violence that resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. However, Algerian hopes were raised with the election of Liamine Zéroual to the presidency on 16 November 1995. Despite widespread electoral fraud, the new head of state succeeded in reinstating the country's legitimate institutions.

Algerians were therefore taken by surprise at President Zéroual's announcement three years later that he intended to resign in order to 'ensure the changeover of power'. This represents something new in the Algerian political tradition. He is the first elected president since independence and the first to leave office by preparing for a successor to replace him through the ballot box. The elections, planned for April 1999, have already attracted several candidates, and will represent a first test of the stability of the institutional framework set up three years ago." (ICG 16 February 1999, Introduction)

"Since December 1991, Algeria has been seized by a wave of violence, which achieved, between 1992 and 1998, the status of virtual civil war. That war was fought between, on

the one hand, a military-backed regime and, on the other, a complex, clandestine opposition derived from the country's banned umbrella Islamist movement, the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS – Jabha Islamiyya li'l-Inqadh). It was triggered by an army-backed coup that blocked the electoral victory of the FIS in the 1991 legislative elections. Official figures put the number of people killed during this period at some 100,000 – or 1,200 deaths a month." (ICG 20 October 2000, Executive Summary)

### **Civilian massacres in Algeria lead to culture of terror in 1997 and 1998**

- Massacres concentrated in west of country
- The Islamic Armed Group (GIA) said to be responsible for most of the violence
- Individuals singled out for defying Islamist demands
- Attackers exhibit exceptional cruelty

### ***HRW describes a situation of generalized terror in Algeria in late 1997 and 1998:***

"Most civilian casualties in 1998 occurred not in the massacres that grabbed headlines but rather in smaller-scale attacks, including bomb explosions in markets and other public places, and assaults on cars and buses traveling the country's roads. In most of these cases the responsibility of Islamist armed groups was not questioned.

There was overwhelming evidence, including the testimony of survivors, that Islamist harmed groups had since 1992 carried out the murder of thousands of individuals singled out for opposing or defying Islamist demands – from refusing to contribute money or provisions to armed groups, to refusing, in the case of women, to adhere to a dress code – or merely because they were related to members of targeted categories, such as security force members. Islamist groups killed whole families, sometimes abducting young women to be held in sexual servitude in guerrilla camps; survivors who escaped some attacks of this kind told Human Rights Watch of religious harangues preceding the murder of their families.

The string of large-scale massacres that began in August 1997 continued into the new year. Massacres in mostly isolated villages in the west of the country claimed at least 800 lives in late December 1997 and early January 1998. An attack on the night of January 11-12 on Sidi Hamed, thirty kilometers south of Algiers, left at least one hundred dead. In Chouardia, a village in Medea province, more than forty persons were reported killed during three hours of carnage on April 27.

The Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS), the now-outlawed political movement that was on the verge of winning the 1992 parliamentary elections before they were halted, condemned the massacres of civilians through its spokespersons in exile. Its own armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army (Armée Islamique du Salut, AIS), was said to have largely observed a truce it began on October 1, 1997, although occasional clashes between the AIS and certain other armed groups reportedly continued.

Domestic and international outrage at the massacres was directed both at the shadowy perpetrators—initially identified as the Islamic Armed Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA)— and at the security forces’ failure to protect civilians. In some instances, massacres occurred within a few hundred meters of security force barracks and posts. Even though the slaughter lasted for hours, generating fire, smoke, explosions, and cries for help, no effort was made by the authorities to intervene to halt the attack or to apprehend the attackers as they withdrew, according to interviews with survivors.

The GIA, a group or groups with a record of brutal attacks on security personnel and terror attacks on civilians, had no visible political structure that commented authoritatively on its program or actions. Increasingly extreme edicts were issued in its name, which authorities permitted to be published in the press despite a strict censorship regime that encompassed statements by FIS leaders. Since the killing in 1994 and 1995 of the GIA’s original leaders, mass killings increasingly became part of the pattern of atrocities attributed to it.

Nearly all of the massacres occurred in isolated or semi-rural communities that had voted for the FIS in the elections of 1990 and 1991 and some of whose residents had provided support to the armed groups since 1992. The attacks were in some cases explained as retaliation by the GIA for communities having withdrawn support from the more extremist group.

The attackers exhibited spectacular cruelty. In addition to guns, they used crude weapons such as knives and saws to behead or disembowel men, women, and children. The attackers sometimes abducted women, raping and enslaving them. The extent of the practice was difficult to gauge. According to interior ministry sources cited in the August 5 issue of the Algerian daily al-Khabar , 2,884 women had reported being raped by armed Islamist groups between 1993 and 1998. Among women who were kidnapped, 319 were still missing.

The succession of massacres between August 1997 and January 1998 were concentrated near the heavily militarized outskirts of Algiers and in the province of Relizane near the western oil port of Arzew. The precinct of Beni Massous on the outskirts of Algiers, where about eighty persons were killed, according to press reports, on September 5, 1997, was virtually surrounded by military installations. Survivors told Algerian reporters the day after the Chouardia massacre that even though a paramilitary gendarme post was located only one kilometer away, security forces did not arrive until four and one-half hours after the killing ended." (HRW 1999, Human Rights Developments)

***Reasons for massacres were often unclear, as explained in October 1999 article by EU Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation:***

"Although individual killings by both government forces and armed groups have been responsible for most of the casualties, since the beginning of 1997 massacres of innocent civilians have become systematic, thereby transforming the conflict into one of indiscriminate and self-perpetuating violence. Most of the massacres were committed in

a systematic and organised manner in villages in areas around the capital, in the Algiers, Blida and Medeain regions. The largest massacres occurred in Sidi Rais, south of Algiers, in August 1997, claiming the lives of up to 300 people, and in Relizane, in December 1997, claiming the lives of over 400 people. Little is known about the reasons for these acts of violence, or the identity of their perpetrators. They may have resulted from GIA members' frustration at their inability to continue hitting state targets. Others have explained the massacres as being land grabs, banditry, local vendettas or the settling of old scores. Often the massacres took place in close proximity to government forces who failed to intervene and let the perpetrators leave the scene after they committed their crimes. This has fed suspicions that security forces, for one reason or another, were actually actively involved in the killings. In another development, armed groups have started to fight each other, possibly in bids to control certain areas and to raise illegal 'taxes' and generate other economic gains. The proliferation of Islamic armed factions and sub-factions, armed gangs, and paramilitary 'self-defence units' has further contributed to a situation where it is no longer clear which aims are being pursued or for what reasons groups have fallen out amongst each other." (EPCPT October 1999, Conflict Dynamics)

***Massacres were described as follows by Hijra International in October 1997 report:***

"Les circonstances de ces massacres sont répétitivement les mêmes. Les assaillants, dont le nombre varie de quelques dizaines à une centaine selon les témoignages, investissent des villages la nuit et s'acharnent pendant plusieurs heures à décimer des familles ciblées, sans distinction d'âge ou de sexe: hommes, femmes, bébés, enfants et vieillards. Le plus souvent ils égorgent ou massacrent leurs victimes à l'arme blanche (haches, sabres, pioches, pelles, ou bêches), mais les témoignages rapportent aussi des cas de victimes tuées par armes à feu ou brûlées vives. Les témoignages rapportent que les biens des victimes sont souvent pillés et leurs maisons brûlées.

[...]

Les massacres ont principalement touché le sud-est de la wilaya d'Alger, les wilayat avoisinantes de la wilaya d'Alger (Boumerdes, Blida, Bouira, Tipaza) et celles de Medea, Ain-Defla, Djelfa et Biskra." (Hijra International October 1997, Des Massacres and La Géographie des Massacres)

For a list of massacres, dates and number of victims for the period from August 1996 to October 1997, please see Hijra International report "Halte aux Massacres en Algérie" [[Internet link](#)].

**Government security forces reportedly involved in attacks on civilians (1999)**

- Former security officials claim Algerian military involved in civilian attacks
- Survivor testimony points to military collusion in civilian massacres
- Military continually absent in intervention efforts to protect civilians

***HRW notes in its 1999 annual report:***

"Doubts that all of the killings attributed to the GIA were the responsibility of a single organization acting alone were fueled by the posture of the security forces towards the perpetrators of the massacres in 1997 and 1998 and by a series of statements by former security officials in exile claiming Algeria's military intelligence apparatus, the Sécurité Militaire, had both deployed forces masquerading as Islamists and manipulated GIA groups through infiltration.

The questions surrounding the massacres received no conclusive answers. Through September [1998], no independent Algerian body had conducted a thorough inquiry. The government allowed no international human rights organization or U.N. human rights rapporteur to investigate the violence.

The suspicions, however, were reinforced by interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch outside of Algeria and by others on the ground with survivors, witnesses from neighboring communities, rescue workers, journalists, and former security personnel. The attackers, numbering sometimes 200 or more, were found to have moved in and killed and departed freely through militarized areas, without any effort on the spot by the security forces to protect civilians or make arrests. At Rais, where the death toll on the night of August 29, 1997 reportedly reached 335, the killings began when men in military uniforms brazenly arrived in two open-backed trucks, firing on men playing dominoes at the entrance to the community, according to accounts that survivors gave to a rescue worker who arrived shortly after the attackers withdrew.

The attackers who killed over 250 people at Bentalha on the night of September 23, 1997 entered the community on foot through orange groves, but according to at least one account, some also arrived in open-backed trucks. Even after the arrival of the army, police, and communal guard on the perimeter of village, the killers were reportedly able to load spoils into trucks before departing unchallenged.

In Bentalha, as elsewhere, the attackers acted with apparent confidence that the security forces on the scene would not attack them. One of the survivors, who had fled to a rooftop with other residents, told Human Rights Watch he saw two military armored-personnel carriers arrive: 'They came up to about one hundred meters away from where we were being attacked. Then they turned on their floodlights—I don't know why, since they didn't rescue us. The people started to shout that the military had come to their rescue, but the [leaders] responded by saying - 'work calmly, the military will not come, don't worry.'

At about 11:30pm on August 29, 1997, about the time that the first shots were fired in Rais, rescue workers who regularly recovered the bodies after massacres were ordered to stand by for work. A rescue worker told us his Algiers team was instructed to drive twenty ambulances to a staging point near Rais, but was then held there for up to two hours by the gendarmerie, before proceeding into the devastated community at about 2 a.m. Although official sources often cited the danger of mines and ambushes laid by the armed groups to explain the lack of response to massacres in progress, the rescue team's

police escort showed no concern for mines or booby traps as they entered Rais, and no interest in identifying or preserving evidence of the crimes committed there. By the rescue worker's account, there was no military presence when they arrived, although the army brought in the press at dawn. He said the gendarmerie intervened to prevent the few survivors from speaking to rescue workers and afterwards, to outsiders. He added that he and his colleagues removed 335 bodies from the scene and identified all but some 40 of the dead, more than three times the official death toll of 98 that was announced.

The massacres in Relizane took place in villages located near a junction of the principal oil and gas pipelines leading from the production areas of the far south to the port of Arzew and the spur pipelines to Algiers. The armed wing of the FIS, the AIS, had reportedly been operating in this strategically sensitive area since 1993, and AIS troops reportedly assisted survivors to bury their slain kin in the massacre's aftermath.

Survivors from Relizane—one of whom had been forced to guide the attackers before escaping into a ravine—told Algerian interviewers that the attackers were strangers to the area, most of whom did not speak the local dialect, and included some men wearing military uniforms. Villagers who were interviewed by an Algerian human rights activist stated that on the morning of one of the massacres, communal guards and gendarmes at the regional market warned them to leave their homes that very day; otherwise, said one, 'You will count the lives of your children tonight in front of us.'  
(HRW 1999, Human Rights Developments)

### **The political landscape in Algeria includes a number of "nationalist", "Islamic" and "democratic" groups (1999)**

- "Nationalist" movements include the Front de liberation national (FLN) and the Rassemblement national démocratique (RND)
- Mouvement de la société pour la paix (MSP/Hamas) and Nahdha comprise the "Islamist" movements
- "Democratic" movements represented by the Front des forces socialistes (FFS), the Rassemblement pour la culture et la démocratie (RCD) and the Parti des travailleurs (PT)

*According to a February 1999 ICG report, the following political groups were represented in the People's National Assembly:*

#### **"The 'nationalist' movement**

This movement is represented by the FLN and the RND.

#### The FLN

The FLN, which rose out of the independence struggle and was formerly the only party permitted, has had great difficulty in adapting to the way the cards are now dealt. The party's platform, based on 'national independence and national unity', remains nostalgic

for an antiquated epoch, and is often out of step with the social and political realities of the country.

Divided into two main groups, the 'reformers' and the 'conservatives', the FLN changes its alliances according to the balance of power within the party and what best serves its own interests at the time. In January 1992 the FLN became a 'fellow traveller' with the FIS and found itself in opposition. However, in February 1996 the party returned to power following a 'palace revolution' among its leaders who preferred a change of tactic. However, the brief spell of virtual opposition to a government of which it was the architect has allowed the FLN to present an image of itself as being open to democracy in a way that it could not have hoped for previously.

### The RND

Regarded as an FLN 'clone', the RND developed the same line of overall thinking and the same reflexes as the former single party, of which it was an extension. The leadership of the RND, created in February 1997 to support President Zérroual, is composed of members of the administration and former FLN staff.

If this fortuitous recruitment pattern relies on the RND's proximity to power and the privileges that it therefore has to offer, its position in the political field leaves the door open to all sorts of alliances, as much with the 'Islamists' as with the 'democrats'. The internal balance of power within the party is constantly fluctuating between the 'democratic nationalists' and the 'Islamic nationalists'.

Set up to provide backing for President Zérroual's policies, the RND has been going through turbulent times since the announcement of his 'resignation' on 11 September 1998, and there is a risk that it may eventually implode. This situation is caused by the lack of any new personality of calibre emerging from the ranks capable of winning the consensual support of the party. As a result, the different factions are lining up behind the presidential candidates of the other parties, particularly the FLN.

### **The 'Islamist' movement**

The MSP/Hamas and Nahdha are the registered representatives of the Islamist movement. Although presenting themselves as 'moderate' in regard to tactics, their objective does not differ from that of the FIS: to impose an Islamic state based on application of the Chari'âa (Koranic law), but in a gradual manner. However, the strategy of violence and murderous madness employed by the FIS served as a lesson to them in how not to go about achieving this objective. Their progress, and that of the FIS a short while ago, stems in great part from the way they have successfully fostered confusion between 'Islam', the religion professed by almost all Algerians, and an intolerant 'Islamism' based on a fundamentalist interpretation of the Koran.

### MSP/Hamas

By a policy of 'one step at a time' and a gradual 'infiltration' into state institutions, the Mouvement de la société pour la paix (MSP/Hamas) has achieved unexpected results. In

the presidential elections of 16 November 1995, its leader, Mahfoud Nahnah gained 25% of the votes and came in second place behind Liamine Zéroual. Despite fraud during the legislative elections of 5 June 1997, the party gained second place behind the RND. The RND still describes itself as an 'opposition party' even though it entered the government with 7 ministerial portfolios.

Thanks to its links with a very large number of 'charitable and humanitarian associations, Hamas has woven a veritable spider's web through Algerian society. As the main party to benefit from the dissolution of the FIS and heir to a significant number of its former voters, Hamas is developing ambiguous tactical positions, and often acts opportunistically. While it denounces terrorism in order to guard its links with the government, it is calling for a general amnesty during the election period so as to win support from the FIS grassroots.

### Nahdha

Less widespread than Hamas, Nahdha is mainly implanted in the east of the country. The sometimes virulent speeches given by Abdellah Djaballah, its leader, are tempered by those of his associates, who are attracted by the 'participationist' strategy used by Hamas. Negotiations began with the RND and the FLN in spring 1998. However, just when it seemed that Nahdha was about to join the government, an internal crisis created a split between the radical supporters of Abdellah Djaballah and the leaders of the party's political bureau. Although negotiations were suspended on news of President Zéroual's resignation and the announcement of early presidential elections in April 1999, the crisis that shook the party is still lying latent.

The balance of power does not presently favour the 'moderate' Islamist parties. They are therefore obliged to provide reassurances and professions of good faith, but these promulgations should not be allowed to delude. Their strategic objective remains unchanged: to succeed by the ballot box where the FIS failed by armed force, and then to impose an Islamic state.

During the years of one-party dictatorship, they were happy to criticise 'the government's socialist option', and to demand a greater 'Islamisation' of society, but without ever repudiating democracy or the multi-party system without which could have no legal existence. Nonetheless, their vision of society remains stamped with the unicity of Arab-Islamic ideology: one nation, one language, one religion, one leader and one party.

When Nahdha was set up in 1990 its leader declared: 'democracy and a secular state are the inventions of the Judeo-Christian west, contrary to our Arab-Islamic values. We are presently subject to a constitution, which we respect. When we reach power we will adopt an Islamic constitution based on the Chari'âa (Koranic law). Secular parties and communists, that do not conform to this constitution, that is to the principles of Islam, will not be tolerated.'

### **The 'democratic' movement**

The movement in favour of democracy is represented by the FFS, the RCD and the PT. Despite relatively limited support in the centre of the country and among the middle-

classes, these parties are developing a platform described as 'modernist'. They support political, cultural and linguistic pluralism, respect for human rights, equal rights for men and women, rejection of the existing code of family law, and the separation of politics and religion.

Contrary to the Islamists, the main themes of their programmes are an extension of the ideas they fought for clandestinely during the years of one-party dictatorship; they are not the result of constraints arising from the political evolution of the past ten years. However, because they each have their own interpretation of the Islamist phenomenon, they remain divided, which considerably reduces their influence.

#### The RCD 'eradicators'

The RCD supported the cancellation of the legislative elections of 26 December 1991 and the subsequent interruption of the electoral process, but is opposed to any dialogue with the FIS. The RCD believes that the only way to counter the armed Islamist groups is to employ legally-sanctioned anti-terrorism measures.

Described by the Islamists as the "Rassemblement contre Dieu" ('Assembly Against God') because of their secular stand, the RCD has been the particular target of the FIS since well before terrorist tactics began to be used. Between 1990 and 1991 public meetings held by the RCD were disturbed time and again by FIS militants using axes and swords, and a number of people were wounded. Since 1992 armed Islamist groups have assassinated scores of RCD activists. Finally, in February 1994, the RCD felt forced to call for armed 'resistance' to the GIA, and a large number of RCD activists and sympathisers have now joined Groupes de légitimes défense (legitimate defence groups), with the support of the authorities.

#### The FFS and PT 'conciliators'

Both these parties have taken part in the 'national reconciliation' process and share the belief that peace lies in dialogue with the FIS.

Under the sponsorship of the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio the FFS and PT, together with the FIS, Nahdha and the FLN signed a contrat national pour la paix et la réconciliation nationale (national contract for peace and national reconciliation) in Rome on 13 January 1995. However, despite this apparent opening, the proposed political solution for ending the crisis in the country soon showed its limits. The FFS and the PT claimed that the FIS had agreed under the terms of the contract to abide by the rules of the democratic game and reject violence. But the Islamists had a different interpretation and claimed that the democrats had accepted their arguments by signing for the primacy of the Law (la loi légitime) above all other laws.

The FFS and the PT found themselves caught in a trap. While intending to insist on the supremacy of a legal system adopted by an elected parliament, they used the same

expression that translates from Arabic to mean the application of 'the Chari'âa' (Koranic law)" as opposed to any institutionally composed body of law.

Rejected by the government and by a large section of the political community, this deal was never likely to succeed. The final straw was the explosion of a booby-trapped car in the center of Algiers resulting in several civilian casualties only the day after the agreement was announced. Anouar Haddam, one of the leaders of the GIA, claimed responsibility for the attack on behalf of that group. Anouar Haddam, living in refuge in the US, had previously signed the peace agreement in Rome on behalf of the FIS.

This split in the 'democrats' between 'eradicators' and 'conciliators' has been sharpened by the multi-faceted manipulations of the government, which succeeded in infiltrating its agents into the highest reaches of the 'democratic' parties. The emergence of a current of democratic thought, which might have constituted a credible alternative to both the government and the Islamists, remained a pious hope." (ICG 16 February 1999, The Multi-Party Assembly)

***Also mentioned about political parties is the following:***

"Apart from the FLN, political parties with some significant following include the Front des forces socialistes (FFS), a secularist and mainly Berber-supported party revived in 1989 and led by Hocine Ait Ahmed, the Mouvement pour la Democratie en Algerie (MDA), created in 1985 by exiled FLN-leader and former President Ahmed Ben Bella, and the Rassemblement pour la culture et la democratie (RCD), a Berber party with minor support led by Saïd Saadi and legalised in 1989, and two legalised Islamic parties that are more or less loyal to the regime." (EPCPT October 1999, Introduction)

For more information about the political scene in Algeria, see ICG report "The People's National Assembly: The past 18 months" of 16 February 1999 [[Internet link](#)].

**A number of armed groups have been involved in the conflict (1999-2000)**

- Two of the largest armed groups are the GIA and the AIS
- GIA is known to be the most ruthless, allegedly killing thousands of civilians
- AIS has respected a cease-fire since 1997

"The main adversaries in the armed conflict are, on the one hand, numerous armed Islamic groups and, on the other hand, the security forces and armed civilian groups allied with them. The two most powerful men in the military are believed to be Lt. General Mohammad Lamari and the head of the military security forces, Mohammad Mediene. The FIS has been increasingly marginalised following the arrest of its long-time leaders Abbasi Madani and Ali Belhadj in June 1991. Armed Islamic groups include the Armee islamique du salut (AIS), the military wing of the FIS comprising an estimated 10,000 men, and a loose organisation of different militant and armed groups known as the Groupes islamiques armes (GIA), comprising an estimated 2,500 to 10,000 men. The

groups falling under the umbrella of the GIA are usually headed by an 'Emir', a military commander, and a 'Caliph', his political guide. They target state officials, journalists, artists, musicians and other civilians. The GIA are reported to engage in black-market operations and mafia practices which enable them to sustain their military activities. Armed groups are also believed to be involved in private corporations that replaced privatised and/or destroyed state-run enterprises, in order to finance their operations. Some of the armed groups' members, the 'Mudjahedin', are believed to have received military training during the war in Afghanistan. They have also reportedly been involved in armed operations in Morocco, Bosnia and Yemen." (EU Platform October 1999, Introduction)

"Islamists are not a homogenous group, though their goal may be apparently the same, i.e., to establish rule according to the shari'a (Islamic law). However, it should be noted that there are two basic opposing lines of thought, one which espouses the belief that Islamic law cannot be imposed until the majority are ready to accept such a law, having accepted the call to Islam (in imitation of the Prophet in Medina). These are not the ones that make up the following groups.

The two largest and best known Islamist armed groups in Algeria are the GIA and the AIS, which have also been rivals. Below is a description of the groups. Each of these is labeled 'terrorist' by the US government although the designation has been omitted below. The term 'terrorist' is over-used and has a legal-political function. The guidelines for defining a terrorist group in the United States are very vague, but ultimately a terrorist group is one defined as such by the Secretary of State. Though there are many organizations that are involved in terrorist activities, only a handful are officially recognized as such because it is a political decision.

*Note:* In 1997, the AIS put down its arms, and it accepted President Bouteflika's amnesty call in 1999.

### **Armed Islamic Groups (GIA)**

The *Groupe islamique armé* (GIA), according to the US State Department profile on the group, is an 'extremist' organization, aimed at overthrowing the secular Algerian regime and replace it with an Islamic state. The GIA began its violent activities in early 1992, after the legislative elections, won by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), were cancelled. Its targets have included civilians, journalists, teachers, and foreign residents. About 100 expatriates, men and women, were killed by the GIA after it announced in September 1993 its campaign against foreigners living in Algeria. The GIA opposes foreigners because it believes that they are part of a plan to colonize Algeria with non-Muslims.

The GIA uses guns, knives, and bombs. It is known to have set off car bombs in the streets of Algiers and to kidnap and slit the throats of its victims. It hijacked an Air France flight to Algiers in December 1994. It is also suspected that they were responsible for the series of bombings in France in 1995.

The number of members in the GIA is not known, and the estimate is several hundred to several thousand. Financial and logistic support is forthcoming from Algerian expatriates,

many residing in western Europe. The Algerian government accused Iran and Sudan of supporting the GIA, and as a result, diplomatic relations with Iran was severed in March 1993.

Allegedly, Antar Zouabri leads the GIA. Early in 1997, he stated, 'There is no neutrality in the war we lead. Except for those who are with us, all the others are renegade.' The GIA has violently opposed Islamists who favor dialogue with the government.

A problem with the designation of 'GIA' is that there appears to be many different groups, perhaps fighting each other, which are designated in the newspapers and by people in general under the umbrella name of 'GIA.' For this reason, even though this group was originally referred to in the singular--Islamic Armed Group--it is sometimes now referred to in the plural, which is the preferred usage in WAAC news updates. For example, the group under Hassan Hattab, considered one of the leaders of the GIA, based in Kabylia, actually separated from the GIA formerly in September 1998 due to differences with another leader, Antar Zouabri, whom he criticized for attacking civilians. His group is now called *Mouvement salafiste pour la daawa et le djihad* (Salafy Movement for the Call and Struggle). He has his own seal, while other leaders have theirs, although all seals have a definite similarity, based on the use of the Qur'an and weapons (rifles or swords) as the central images, and these seals are used very rarely. However, it should be noted that whether or not these groups are related or under one leadership, they are still referred to only as 'GIA.'

Since 1996, the GIA has been held responsible for the massacre and mutilation of innocents--babies, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. While since the fall of 1998, most of the attacks have been against those associated with the military or the militia, many of these have been families (children, wives, parents, grandparents) of government or militia forces or military personnel on leave in plain clothes.

### **Islamic Salvation Army (AIS)**

The *Armée islamique du salut* (AIS) is the second largest armed Islamist group in Algeria. It was founded in 1994 by the FIS as its "fighting wing" in order to counterbalance the GIA, from which the FIS desired to alienate itself. However, the AIS is autonomous and does not necessarily take orders from the FIS, and the AIS has been known to collaborate with the GIA.

Most of the AIS followers were allegedly young, ardent, and driven by the belief that they had little to lose in fighting the government. The AIS differed from the GIA in that it claimed it was innocent of the indiscriminate killing of civilians or bombings and that they focused on fighting the Algerian security forces.

In response to criticism over the actions of the AIS, the FIS stated that its illegal status tied its hands, and it could not 'gain control over the guerrillas until it is restored to legality...and is allowed to rebuild its dismembered party organization.' (see Andrew Bilski, "A Reign of Terror: Muslim Fundamentalists Battle for Power," *Maclean's*, March 21, 1994).

The AIS, however, recognized a cease fire since 1997, and accepted the amnesty call by President Bouteflika in 1999.

### **Islamic Front for Armed Jihad (FIDA)**

A lesser known group, the *Front islamique pour le Djihad armé* (FIDA) claimed responsibility for the assassination of the General Union of Algerian Workers' (UGTA) leader, Abd al-Haq bin-Hamouda on January 28, 1997. It is believed that FIDA is the armed wing of al-Djazaraa, an Islamist group, and that its members are from the educated elite.

### **Islamic League for Preaching and Jihad (LIDD)**

Little is known about the *Ligue islamique de la daawa et le djihad* (LIDD) other than it has issued dire statements prophesizing that more blood will be shed and accusing the Algerian regime of tyranny.

### **NOTE:**

The above is a description of the armed Islamist groups which have been mentioned at one time or another in the papers concerning the violence in Algeria. There may be many others, and splits do occur over disagreements. Descriptions are based on several sources, including official US reports (i.e., CIA information), international news reports, Algerian sources, and academic research material, where available." (WAAC 2000, Algeria's Armed Islamist Groups)

## **Recent developments (1999-2000)**

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### **Hopes for peace on rise with election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika as president in 1999**

- Bouteflika elected amidst talk of electoral fraud
- Despite dubious election process, Algerians hopeful for peace
- Violence receded with Bouteflika's announcement of limited amnesty for perpetrators of violence

"Bouteflika, a former foreign minister, was elected to a five-year term April 15 [1999] in a vote marred by the last-minute withdrawal of the other six candidates, who charged the outcome was being engineered in his favor by the military establishment. This turn of events disappointed many who had been encouraged by the vigor and pluralism of the race, in which important issues were debated on television, in the print media, and in public meetings and rallies." (HRW 2000, Human Rights Developments)

"In April 1999, a page was turned in Algeria's lengthy political crisis with the election as President of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the military's preferred candidate and the country's veteran Foreign Minister under President Boumedienne in the 1970s. Following Bouteflika's election, hopes rose and violence receded, as the new President introduced a limited amnesty for the perpetrators of violence – the Law on Civil Concord – and

promised further fundamental reforms designed to bring the crisis of violence in the country to an end.

[...]

In April 1999, a new era in Algeria's lengthy political crisis opened with the election as President of the country's veteran Foreign Minister under President Boumediène in the 1970s, Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The expected lustre associated with the presidential elections – the outgoing President, Liamine Zeroual,<sup>2</sup> had promised that they would be free of government interference – was seriously dimmed, however, when six candidates withdrew because of electoral fraud designed to ensure victory for Bouteflika, the army's preferred candidate. Nonetheless, the early signs were encouraging. After over seven years of bloody civil conflict – in which, according to official figures, some 100,000 people lost their lives – violence declined. The new President introduced a limited amnesty for the Islamists – the Law on Civil Concord – and promised further fundamental reforms aimed at bringing an end to violence. Over the past few years, there has been increasing awareness that the army's total war and eradication tactics have had limited success." (ICG 20 October 2000, Executive Summary and sect. I)

### **Bouteflika makes unprecedented admissions about violence in Algeria but falls short of demanding justice for its victims (2000)**

- Bouteflika recognizes the death of 100,000 Algerians since 1992
- He speaks with sympathy about thousands of disappearances in Algeria
- However, he accords low priority to investigating past violations

"Inaugurated April 27 [1999], Bouteflika moved quickly on his plan for peace. He unveiled a draft 'Civil Harmony law' after the AIS offered to make its 1997 cease-fire permanent. The law, which developed the terms of a 1995 clemency decree, was adopted by parliament in July and overwhelmingly endorsed in a national referendum September 16. Bouteflika also freed some persons imprisoned in connection with the conflict and shed the official discourse that sought to minimize the devastation it had wrought. On June 27, he announced that 100,000 Algerians had died since the strife began in 1992, a number more than three times greater than the last official figure to be issued. He also spoke with sympathy about the thousands of Algerians who had 'disappeared', and abandoned the official line that denied a security-force role in the phenomenon.

But if more candid than his predecessors, Bouteflika accorded low priority to investigating the grave violations of the recent past and pursuing some form of justice for the victims. Explaining in a July 7 Radio France Internationale interview why relatives of the 'disappeared' had to be patient, he declared, ' We must first try to establish peace and security....If we try to attack all the problems at once we shall lose our way.' When advocates of the 'disappeared' continued to press their case he betrayed exasperation, chiding them at a public appearance in Algiers on September 15, 'I have no interest in keeping [the 'disappeared'] in my pocket!....How are you going to leave this war behind if you don't forget?'

While there were few reports of persons 'disappearing' in 1998 and 1999, almost no Algerians who had 'disappeared' in earlier years reappeared, nor was their fate or location revealed. Bureaus that the Interior Ministry had established in 1998 to receive and investigate complaints of 'disappearances' closed quietly without, in the vast majority of cases, producing information." (HRW 2000, Human Rights Developments)

### **President's popularity waning among military (October 2000)**

- Dissatisfaction with President has grown among army leaders since 1999
- Frequent travel and lack of progress in attracting foreign investment viewed poorly at home

"When Algeria's military chiefs decided to support the candidature of Abdelaziz Bouteflika for the April 1999 presidential elections, they could not have imagined that they would regret their choice so quickly. Yet they knew perfectly well what they would get. Mr Bouteflika had taken time to negotiate his return with those who had wanted him back and there was no doubt over his political views or his economic preferences.

The withdrawal of six opposition candidates before the first round of the presidential elections seriously undermined Abdelaziz Bouteflika's potential legitimacy as President even before he had taken his presidential oath. Afterwards, he sought to compensate for his domestic isolation and very quickly exploited the media, particularly those operating abroad. He gave countless interviews in which he constantly reiterated the point that the army and he both accepted the same division of responsibilities between them, something that he also made sure to repeat in his writings. During the first six months of his presidency (April 1999 to October 1999), the bargain appeared to hold and he faced virtually no problems in his relationship with the army. Inevitably, the formation of a new government involved hard bargaining, but nobody had expected that it would occur without disagreements and a kind of consensus was eventually established.

Things began to go wrong when the President's diplomatic self-restraint failed him and he made public attacks on Morocco and Tunisia. They worsened at the end of 1999 when he erroneously claimed that the assassination of Abdelkader Hachani – the only Islamist leader at liberty with a charismatic personality that appealed to both FIS militants and sympathisers – was an attack against his amnesty project in the law of Civil Concord. The statement was interpreted as an indirect attack on the army leadership – something for which he would not be forgiven easily.

At the same time, dissatisfaction with the President has grown among army commanders for other reasons. Despite his promises, President Bouteflika has been unable to attract significant investment from the Gulf, which he had hoped might help re-launch a prostrate economy. His frequent foreign journeys and the attendant publicity are increasingly poorly received at home and the renewal of violence at the start of Ramadan in 2000 marked the failure of his Civil Concord policy. At the start of Spring 2000, the Algerian press, sifting through the sparse information available to it, had come to the conclusion that the army wanted to replace Bouteflika. Less than a year after he was

elected, “Boutef”, as he was popularly known in Algiers, was holed up in the imposing Presidential residence in El-Mouradia in Algiers, believed by many in the army to have wasted the advantages with which he had started his presidency." (ICG 20 October 2000, sect. IV, C)

### **Latest reports indicate that conflict in Algeria is far from over (July-November 2000)**

- Upsurge in violence since beginning of 2000
- 300 persons killed per month in Algeria
- Growing dissatisfaction with President Bouteflika among Algerian elite
- Fundamental political issues have not been properly addressed
- GIA continues indiscriminate policy of civilian massacres

### ***ICG remarks in its October 2000 report:***

"Today, however, those hopes [after election of Bouteflika] have been largely dashed. Violence is, once again, on the rise. The amnesty decreed last year has been only partially successful; the Civil Concord Law was denounced by the Islamists as a police measure rather than a reconciliation policy. Eighteen months after Bouteflika's election, there is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the President's performance among members of the Algerian elite and the Algerian military.

In short, the country's crisis is far from over and the fundamental issues that caused it have not yet been properly addressed. In particular, no attention has been paid by the authorities in Algiers to addressing the key issues around which violence erupted in 1992-93: the need to fundamentally restructure and relegitimise the Algerian state, accept the failure of the strategy of eradication of the Islamists and open up the political process. For the Islamists, there must be legitimate means for them to express themselves within the formal political arena. For the legal political parties, there must be an opportunity to participate meaningfully in political life, and to make the government and institutions of the state accountable to elected politicians – something that would mark a significant new departure in Algerian politics.

[...]

Violence has been on the rise since the start of 2000, after a six month-long amnesty which led to some 2,000 submissions and the voluntary dissolution of one armed group, the *Armée Islamique du Salut* (AIS, *Jaysh Islamiyya li'l-Inqadh*). While recent killings have not been on the scale of the massive violence that occurred between 1992 and 1998, when deaths averaged some 1,200 persons per month, there has been a marked upsurge of violence in recent months. Official figures put the number of people killed at approximately 300 a month, though the true level could be even higher. Even more disturbing is the fact that the death rate is accelerating: at the beginning of the year, the death toll was between one- and two-thirds of this level. Blame for the violence was pinned on clandestine armed groups which had rejected the amnesty – the revived remnants of the original Groupe Islamique Armé (GIA, *Jamiyy'a Islamiyya Muslaha*), under the command of Antar Zouabri and based around Blida, and a new group, the

Groupe Salafiyyste de Daw'a et Jihad (GSDJ, Jamiyy'a Salafiyya li'l-Daw'a wa'l Jihad), led by Hassan Hattab and located to the east of Algiers.

The GIA continues its indiscriminate policy of civilian massacres, whilst the GSDJ focuses its attacks on security force personnel. The area in which these groups operate is widening, too, and has reached as far as the Tunisian border to the east and to the coastal resort of Tipaza in the west. Outside major urban areas, where the security forces now ensure public order through their massive presence, security is uncertain, partly because of the activities of the 200,000-strong paramilitary militias, which were created in the mid-1990s to support the security forces but which are under local control and have, in some cases, been used for personal advantage." (ICG October 2000, Executive Summary and sects. I and IIA)

***HRW observed in its 2000 annual report:***

"If the number of arrests, killings, and 'disappearances' were down, Algeria remained the most violent country in the Middle East and North Africa. While the Islamic Salvation Army (Armée Islamique du Salut, AIS) generally respected a cease-fire it declared in 1997, others, particularly the groups known under the Armed Islamic Group rubric (Groupe islamique armé, GIA), continued to target civilians indiscriminately. Hundreds of unarmed men, women, and children were slaughtered in brutal fashion in attacks, particularly in rural areas, that were officially blamed on 'terrorists'. Scores of teenage and adult women were abducted in these attacks. According to the testimony of women who had survived captivity, some abducted women were enslaved, raped, and later executed.

The GIA generally did not claim responsibility or explain motives for particular attacks on civilians, although communiqués issued in its name were occasionally received by foreign media. There was speculation that in many instances families or villages were selected for indiscriminate slaughter because members were suspected of opposing or withdrawing assistance from the armed groups.

Within the framework of fighting 'terrorism' and 'subversion,' the security forces continued to employ brutal methods. Accounts of army and police operations carried by the Algerian press, which was constrained to rely heavily on security sources, continued to depict raids that resulted in the deaths of unnamed 'terrorists' but almost never their capture. But reports of torture, which had become systematic since 1992 in the interrogation of security suspects, declined along with the number of confirmed new arrests.

Algeria's conflict continued to be characterised by an extreme lack of accountability for abuses. Tens of thousands of persons were killed, 'disappeared,' or abducted since 1992, without, in the vast majority of cases, law enforcement authorities formally investigating and elucidating what happened. Nor did trials serve often as a venue for carefully weighing evidence that linked deeds to particular individuals." (HRW 2000, Human Rights Developments)

***Also from FIDH in July 2000:***

"Si la sécurité est revenue dans les grandes villes, si la vague de disparitions massives a cessé, si l'ampleur des massacres est moindre, une violence intolérable faisant au moins cinquante morts par semaine persiste en Algérie. Ainsi, de nouvelles victimes s'ajoutent chaque jour aux dizaines de milliers de victimes des huit années écolées, alourdissant encore l'insupportable catalogue d'atrocités, souffrances et traumatismes. C'est le cri de douleur de ces victimes de leur famille qu'il convient d'abord d'entendre, de toutes les victimes, celle des groupes armés islamistes comme des forces de l'ordre ou des groupes d'autodéfense, ou encore du simple banditisme.

[...]

La violence politique demeure constante et importante. Si le terrorisme semble avoir été maîtrisé dans les grandes villes, il n'en va pas de même dans de nombreuses zones du pays: quotidiennement, des civils, des militaires, des agents des divers corps de sécurité sont assassinés dans des conditions atroces." (FIDH July 2000, "Justice et paix pour l'Algérie" et "Vérité, justice: entendre les victimes")

***And published by Amnesty International in November 2000:***

"[A]lthough the level of killing and human rights abuses has fallen significantly over the last two years, it remains very high. Since early 1999, some 200 people have been killed every month. Hundreds have been civilians killed in attacks carried out by armed groups calling themselves 'Islamic groups.' Some have been deliberately targeted; others have been the unfortunate victims of an indiscriminate bomb or mortar attack. Others have been members of the security forces, paramilitary militias and armed groups killed in attacks, ambushes and armed confrontations." (AI 8 November 2000, The Need to Conduct Investigations)

See ICG report "The Algerian Crisis: Not Over Yet" for more information on the current political situation in Algeria [[Internet link](#)].

**Armed attacks on the rise during holy month of Ramadan (December 2000)**

"Altogether nearly 150 people have been killed so far during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when Islamic fundamentalist rebels traditionally step up their attacks.

Most of those killed have been civilians or members of the security forces.

There have been three attacks in the past 24 hours [posted on 18 December 2000]:

Fifteen travellers reported killed at Tenes, 200 km (130 miles) west of Algiers

Five people killed, including three women, at Khemis Miliana, 120 km west of the capital

15 students and their supervisor killed in an overnight attack at a boarding school in Medea, 80 km south of Algiers

In this first incident, gunmen burst into a dormitory while the students were either asleep or reading and opened fire. The students were all aged between 15 and 17.

No one has yet said that they carried out the attack, but witnesses said the attackers were Islamic fundamentalists belonging to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), believed to be the most active armed group in the area." (BBC 18 December 2000)

## POPULATION PROFILE AND FIGURES

### General

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**Only the roughest of figures exist due to long-standing problems of access (1997-1999)**

#### **1999:**

"Hundreds of thousands of Algerians have fled their country's domestic political violence during the past seven years, but the numbers remain uncounted and unknown.

[...]

Some 100,000 to 200,000 Algerians were believed to be internally displaced at the end of 1999, but more precise estimates of their numbers were virtually impossible because the international community had no access to the country's conflict zone." (USCR 2000, p. 62)

#### **1998:**

"The full extent of population displacement remained unclear during 1998 because the government restricted access to conflict areas. One new study estimated that hundreds of thousands have become uprooted since 1992, primarily from small towns 25 to 50 miles south of Algiers. Additional displacement was reported in northwest Algeria, about 250 miles from the capital. Hundreds of people reportedly fled their homes in Bouira Province, about 50 miles east of Algiers, because of massacres in January 1998.

Many families uprooted from small villages and farms have fled to the capital, where some reportedly have settled into schools and mosques. Thousands lived in tents and cargo containers along busy roads. Others resided in shanty towns of corrugated iron that have sprung up in Algiers in recent years." (USCR 1999, p. 47)

"Though precise information is impossible to obtain, the following examples, cited by the Algerian Refugee Council, give some indication of the scale and extent of displacement.

Médéa is believed to be an important base for the GIA. An estimated 200,000 people are said to have left for nearby Algiers, or to have fled abroad.

Blida was the scene of some of the worst massacres. An estimated 50,000-100,000 people have fled, mainly to Algiers nearby.

In Ouled Allel about 15,000 were evacuated – almost the whole town.

In Larba about 5000 were displaced – 20 per cent of the population.

In Telagh (between Sidi bel Abbès and Oran) 3000 people were displaced following government bombardments in 1993

In Sidi Moussa town, Cheraga, near Algiers and Bouinane, 8000 people were displaced. In Les Eucalyptus, 500 people were displaced following a massacre attributed to GIA. Ouled Beni Messous (suburban Algiers) was the site of double displacement: many had sought refuge there, then fled again following further massacres." (Dammers 1998, p. 180)

**1997:**

"Thousands of Algerians were internally displaced by the country's bloody conflict. Reliable estimates of their numbers were unavailable, however." (USCR 1998, p. 48)

*During these same years, tens of thousands of Algerians reportedly sought official asylum in Europe. Hundreds of thousands more were said to have fled to Europe without filing for official asylum. For more information see USCR Annual Reports 1998-2000.*

# PHYSICAL SECURITY & FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

## General

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### General human rights record in Algeria remains extremely poor (2000)

- Despite decrease in security incidents since 1998, hundreds of civilians continue to be killed by armed groups each month
- Torture and ill-treatment are reportedly commonplace
- Lack of investigations results in impunity for those responsible
- Women are at particular risk

"Reports of torture and ill-treatment by the security forces have substantially decreased in the last two years. However, dozens of people arrested during recent months on suspicion of being linked to armed groups have been subjected to torture or ill-treatment in custody. There continues to be a lack of investigations into these human rights violations and impunity is afforded to those allegedly responsible." (AI 8 November 2000, The Need to Conduct Investigations)

"Although the number of security incidents involving armed groups and terrorists decreased significantly and became more localized in the first several months of the year, compared with the same period in 1998, these opposition forces committed numerous serious abuses and killed thousands of civilians. Furthermore, such abuses and killings increased in the second half of the year. Armed terrorists continued their widespread campaign of insurgency, targeting government officials and families of security-force members, as well as those whose lifestyles they considered to be in conflict with Islamic values. Increasingly the killing appeared to be related to opposition to the amnesty program. Several hundred terrorists have availed themselves of the amnesty program so far, and the armed groups have become smaller, but a hard-core opposition force remains.

Armed groups killed numerous civilians, including infants, in massacres and with small-bombs. Bombs left in cars, cafes, and markets killed and maimed persons indiscriminately. Some killings also were attributed to revenge, banditry, and land grabs. There were estimates that as many as 3,000 civilians, terrorists, and security force members died during the year in domestic turmoil. After his election, President Bouteflika acknowledged that a more accurate accounting of the number of persons killed during the past 8 years placed the total at about 100,000. Armed terrorists particularly targeted women; there were numerous instances of kidnapping and rape." (US DOS 25 February 2000, Introduction)

### **Individuals traditionally at risk include intellectuals, ethnic Berbers, journalists and women (1995-1998)**

- Armed opposition has attacked those whose lifestyles are deemed to conflict with 'Islamic' values
- Prominent figures amongst the artistic and intellectual communities have been murdered
- Foreigners, judges, and state employees are targeted as a means to bring down the government

"The armed opposition has attacked those seen as instruments of the Algerian state or whose lifestyles deemed to conflict with 'Islamic' values. Women, particularly those leading western lifestyles, have disproportionately suffered, often becoming the victims of rape, kidnapping, and murder. Members of the Algerian government and security forces and their families, political activists, journalists, and artists have also been targeted. Armed 'Islamic' groups also have resorted to murdering young men of draft age simply because they were eligible for military service and could be deployed against the opposition cause." (USCR October 1998)

#### **"Artists/Intellectuals**

According to one observer, militant Islamist groups have targeted artists and intellectuals by murdering their most prominent figures (**Le Monde**, 23 April 1995). Among the victims are the director of the national theatre, Azzedine Medjoubi, killed in February 1994; the popular *rai* singer, Cheb Hasni, in September 1994; the playwright Abdelkader Alloula and the director of the Fine Arts school, Ahmed Asselah; the writer and journalist Tohar Djaout, and the architect and feminist Nabile Dialmine, in February 1995 (**Ibid.**). Film actors reportedly work in an atmosphere of terror which makes it difficult to assemble together for the production of films (**Le Monde**, 23 April 1995). Others have fled into exile (**International Herald Tribune**, 5 May 1995; **Le Monde**, 23 April 1995).

#### **The Berbers**

Algeria's Berbers comprise one-quarter of the total population of the country, with two-thirds of them inhabiting the Kabylia region east of Algiers (**The Economist**, 15 October 1994). Kabylie is said to be a "bastion of resistance, rebelling against the central government and the Islamists" (**Le Devoir**, 1-2 avril 1995). Their rebellion against the central government is said to have led to the formation of the Berber Cultural Renaissance Movement, which blossomed as a reaction against the forced Arabization of Algeria begun in 1968, a policy they claim produced generations of "intellectually broken" schoolchildren (**Ibid.**) The most important of their demands to the government is the recognition of their language, *Tamazigh*, as one of the official languages of Algeria, together with French and Arabic, an issue over which there have been multiple labour strikes and school boycottings (**Ibid.**; **Jeune Afrique**, 14 December 1994). At present, however, the Berbers find themselves caught in the larger conflict of Algeria, with entire villages in Kabylia taken hostage by Islamist armed groups in search of weapons, which in turn has led to the formation, under government auspices, of "self-defense" groups, composed of males over 17 years of age armed with hunting rifles and automatic pistols (**Le Journal de Geneve et Gazette de Lausanne**, 20 mars 1995; **Middle East Times**, 25-31 December 1994).

### **Foreigners**

The tactic of killing foreigners in Algeria is said to have been started in 1993 by the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) and the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) in an effort to bring down the government (**International Herald Tribune**, 6-7 May 1995). The 5 May 1995 killing of five foreign workers at a natural gas pipeline project has brought to 85 the number of foreigners assassinated, of whom 28 were French citizens, as well as teachers, priests, nuns, construction workers and diplomats of other nationalities (**Ibid.**).

### **Government Employees**

According to the London-based daily **Al-Hayat**, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) ordered Algerian Government employees to quit their jobs or die, the second such statement since the appointment of Madani Mezrak as the group's new leader in Algeria (**Reuters**, 21 March 1995). The FIS statement allegedly stated that all attacks would target "all those who support the injustice of the regime and its tyranny, whether they are individuals holding posts like heads of local councils, or members of the transitional council (parliament), armed militias and informers, regardless of their ethnic or political affiliation" (**Ibid.**).

### **Journalists**

Since the start of the conflict in 1992, approximately 50 Algerian journalists have reportedly been assassinated by armed Islamists (**International Herald Tribune**, 27 October 1995). On the one hand, journalists are said to be targeted by the Islamists who, angered at the government's apparent stranglehold over the media, accuse reporters of biased and distorted reporting leading to the failure of talks with the government (**The Middle East**, February 1995). On the other, journalists also claim to be "hounded by the government, which has closed or suspended a number of papers because of their reporting", and any paper sympathetic to, or even neutral towards the Islamic cause has been closed down (**Ibid.**). Most of them live in a special hotel and are taken to work with an armed escort, carrying no identification and hiding their faces (**Ibid.**).

### **Judges/Magistrates**

Islamist militants are said to regard judges and magistrates as symbols of government repression, and reportedly have killed more than 20 magistrates since 1993 (**Reuters**, 7 May 1995). The latest such incident was reported in early May 1995, when Mr. Djamel Amar Assani, a state prosecutor at Medea court, situated about 70 kilometers southwest of Algiers, was killed in front of his children by a spray of bullets as he opened the door of his car (**Ibid.**) Many lawyers died or received death threats for their participation in the special courts [abolished in February 1995]: some at the hand of Islamic groups (**Index on Censorship**, April-May 1994). They had been warned not to plead in the special courts, and others were harassed, suspended or imprisoned by the authorities for defending Islamists or appealing their sentences in higher courts (**Ibid.**).

### **Police/Security Forces**

Members of the Algerian police and security forces and their families have been the victims of car bomb attacks by armed groups: in March 1995, a car loaded with explosives went off beside a block of buildings housing police personnel and their

families, wounding 63 people, eight of them children (**Libération**, 11-12 mars 1995). Early in the morning of 17 May 1995, another car bomb exploded near a police station in a town near Algiers, wounding 13 people, including two children (**Reuters**, 17 May 1995). In July 1995, an estimated 14 people were believed to have been killed when a car bomb exploded outside a building housing police families in the town of Boufarik, near Algiers (**Agence France Presse**, 17 July 1995). Young men of military age are also caught between two forces: threatened by the armed groups if they do not refuse to join the army or desert after having been conscripted, they also risk imprisonment if they desert the army or refuse to join (**Amnesty International**, October 1994). Another threat to army and police officers are the so-called "false checkpoints" along some roads where, believing they are dealing with colleagues, they show their identity badges, whereupon they are decapitated, their heads placed in plastic bags before being set on fire (**Index on Censorship**, April-May 1994).

### **Students/School Teachers**

According to **Reuters**, in 1994 the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) ordered students at universities and schools to boycott classes because they hindered the "holy war" the GIA is waging to overthrow the government in order to replace it with an Islamic state (**Reuters**, 1 March 1995). On the other hand, **Amnesty International** has reported instances of teachers who, under threat by armed Islamist groups, have advised their female students to wear the *hidjab* (Islamic veil) and, as a result, have been arrested and imprisoned for encouraging civil disobedience (October 1994). Conversely, in an incident said not to have been adequately explained by the government, the **U.S. Department of State** reports that in March 1994 nine students and their teacher from the El Oued area were allegedly arrested by police "to verify their military service status", released after several weeks in detention and were "immediately killed by unknown 'terrorists' after release" (**Country Reports 1994**, 1995).

### **Women**

According to a statement published in the Arab-language newspaper *Al-Hayat*, on 10 March 1995 the GIA issued an ultimatum to the Government to free jailed "women believers" or suffer the deaths of "women police officers or the wives of members of the security forces" (**Agence France Presse**, 10 March 1995). The latter were allegedly targeted because "it is not legitimately allowed that a Moslem wife should remain with her husband if he becomes an apostate by supporting the tyrant" (**Ibid.**) On 13 March 1995, after the expiration of the GIA deadline, the Algerian Press Service reported that a group of six Islamists abducted a 15-year-old schoolgirl from her school near Algiers, slit her throat and left her body in the gutter in front of the school (**Agence France Presse**, 13 March 1995). That same day, the daily *Liberté* is said to have reported that two sisters, aged 18 and 21 (one of whom was engaged to marry a policeman), were assassinated in Reghaia by three armed men, in front of their parents and younger sister (**Ibid.**). In May 1995, the GIA allegedly expanded its threat to include the wives of government officials (**International Herald Tribune**, 4 May 1995). In addition, Islamists have forced the closure of traditional meeting places for women, such as the hairdressers' and public baths (*hammams*), which are considered by the fundamentalists to be places of "debauchery and corruption" (**L'Express International**, 30 March 1995). claim that at

least 200 women have been killed since the start of the conflict in 1992 (**Ibid.**). Figures allegedly provided in August 1995 by the Algerian Security Forces indicate that 211 women were killed in 1994, and 160 had been assassinated so far in 1995 (**Liberté**, 5 August 1995). (Refworld October 1995, sect. 4.5)

## SUBSISTENCE NEEDS (HEALTH NUTRITION AND SHELTER)

### Shelter

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#### Severe housing crisis in Algeria affects the whole of society (October 2000)

- At least 2 million new housing units needed
- Current construction rate of 100,000 per year is only enough to keep up with annual growth
- Existing housing structures require improvements

"Economic and political mismanagement in the past has created a severe social crisis in Algeria. Housing provision is seriously inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity; at least 2 million new housing units are needed and much of the existing stock is in very poor condition. The physical infrastructure needs considerable attention and social provision – largely because of the economic restructuring programme and violence – has undergone serious declines in the fields of education and health. Urban service provision is inadequate and administration is poor. All these circumstances, alongside economic hardship, political exclusion and deficient security, are ideal breeding grounds for renewed anger against government and for a regeneration of violence amongst those who feel excluded and marginalised.

[...]

Housing: There is a desperate need for adequate housing, given population growth rates of in excess of 3 per cent per annum until the 1980s and of 2.6 per cent since 1985 alongside urbanisation growth rates of 4.5 per cent per year. In 1996, 28 million people lived in 3.6 million housing units - an occupancy ratio of 7.8 - in which 55 per cent of the housing stock had been built before independence in 1962 and 10 per cent is considered to be unsanitary. There is an estimated shortage of at least 2 million units and the current construction rate of 100,000 per year is only slightly in excess of the annual growth in demand. This should be a high priority area for state intervention, whether direct or through public-private partnership." (ICG October 2000, sect. II, D, 4 and sect. V, D, 2)

# HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

## General

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### Information void in Algeria due to lack of access (1997-2000)

- Entry denied to human rights organizations and UN special rapporteurs
- Information about human rights conditions heavily restricted by government
- Witnesses reluctant to testify for fear of reprisal

"Information about human rights conditions was heavily restricted by government policies on information and access. Major international human rights organizations were prohibited from visiting the country. Foreign journalists were granted visas selectively and then assigned armed escorts, ostensibly for their own protection, who often got in the way of interviewing ordinary people. Censorship prevented the Algerian press from reporting independently on security force operations. The U.N. rapporteurs on torture and on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions were again unable to secure invitations to visit Algeria, despite long-standing requests to do so. (HRW 2000, Defending Human Rights)

"Leading examples of governments that successfully bar international involvement with their displaced populations are Turkey, Burma, and Algeria. The situations in the three countries are, of course, quite different . . . In Algeria, displacement is a by-product of conflict, primarily between the government and Islamist insurgent groups.

[...]

Outside efforts to influence the three governments are made difficult by their failure to request international assistance and by their shielding themselves behind the 'sanctity' of sovereignty...In the case of Algeria, outside intervention would contradict the government's assertions that it is adequately caring for its population and that the violence is under control.

[...]

"The scale of internal displacement in Algeria and the conditions of the displaced are largely unknown because entry has generally been denied to human rights and refugee organizations, especially since 1997, and to many journalists. Moreover, those who manage to make site visits are limited by lack of access and security risks and have not tended to collect information about those forcibly displaced as a result of the violence." (Cohen in FMR 6 December 1999, para. 2 and Algeria: the information void)

"The biggest impediments to human rights work were not so much acts of repression directed at activists as obstacles placed in the way of information. These included restrictions on access to the scenes of mass killings, and intimidation that dissuaded persons from speaking to outsiders. The reluctance of witnesses to testify was prompted sometimes by fear of the security services or of armed groups, or both. The government

provided little or no information in response to démarches from human rights organizations and lawyers concerning the whereabouts of 'disappeared' persons and other human rights matters.

[...]

During 1998, the government continued to deny requests to visit from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Federation of Human Rights, and from the U.N. special rapporteurs on torture and summary executions. (HRW 1999, Defending Human Rights)

**Only mission allowed entry in 1998 was a UN "panel of eminent persons" that did not focus on human rights abuses (1998-1999)**

- UN mission charged with collecting general information on the situation in Algeria
- Delegation's report offered no direct criticism of Algerian human rights record
- Mission focused its report on denouncing terrorism

"Algeria, did, however, agree to receive a 'panel of eminent persons' appointed by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and headed by Mario Soares, the former president of Portugal, which visited Algeria from July 22 to August 4 [1998]. The secretary general was careful not to describe the mission of the panel in terms of human rights. Rather its charge was to 'gather information on the situation of Algeria and present a report to him, which he will make public.' According to Annan's spokesperson, 'The government of Algeria has assured the secretary-general that it will ensure free and complete access to all sources of information necessary for the panel to exercise its functions in order to have a clear vision and a precise perception of the reality of the situation in all its dimensions in Algeria today.'" (HRW August 1998, Summary and Recommendations)

"Aside from a government-imposed ban on meeting leaders of the outlawed Islamic Salvation Front, the delegation [U.N. 'panel of eminent persons'] enjoyed considerable freedom of movement during their July 22–August 4 visit. They met with a wide range of people, including human rights lawyers and victims, visited a prison, and traveled to two villages where massacres had occurred.

The delegation's report, issued September 16, vehemently denounced terrorism but offered no direct criticism of the authorities responsible for torture, 'disappearances,' and other abuses. It urged the government to strengthen the rule of law and handle abuse complaints expeditiously, but these recommendations were quite general and seemed secondary to the plea to the international community to support Algeria in fighting terrorism and 'consolidating democracy.' By soft-pedaling the concerns expressed by the U.N.'s Human Rights Committee, the report exemplified the frequent failure by U.N. political bodies to incorporate into their analysis the findings of U.N. human rights institutions and mechanisms.

Before and during the delegation's visit, Algerian authorities had insisted that Soares and his colleagues had no investigative mandate. The delegation itself acknowledged this. But

upon seeing the report, Foreign Minister Ahmed Attaf spoke as if the delegation had conducted a definitive fact-finding investigation. The report, he said on September 16, has 'refuted any doubt about the sources of terrorism' and 'reaffirmed the Algerian government's assertions that there is no human rights crisis in Algeria, only a number of isolated abuses and individual cases which have been dealt with in accordance with the stipulations of Algerian law.'

At the March-April session of the Commission on Human Rights, no member state introduced a resolution on Algeria, and no formal discussion took place of the need to investigate human rights conditions there. This despite Annan's remarking to reporters during the session that he hoped Algeria would admit the rapporteurs and Robinson telling the press she would favor a resolution to that effect. At the human rights sub-commission session in August, a resolution urging Algeria to accept rapporteurs was defeated." (HRW 1999, The Role of the International Community)

### **Entry to country finally granted to a few human rights/humanitarian organizations in late 1999/2000**

- ICRC able to resume visits to prisoners in Algeria in October 1999
- Amnesty International able to visit Algeria in May and November 2000 after four years of refused entry
- International Federation of Human Rights makes visit to Algeria in June 2000 albeit with strict surveillance

"On October 10 [1999], the International Committee of the Red Cross resumed visits to prisoners in Algeria, seven years after such visits were suspended. The government agreed to allow access to all persons held in facilities under ministry of justice auspices, a program that would provide outside, albeit discreet, monitoring of the treatment of inmates.

[...]

"In September [1999], President Bouteflika declared on more than one occasion that Amnesty International, and human rights organizations generally, were welcome in Algeria. However, as of this writing, no major international organization had been issued entry visas for its representatives. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Federation of Human Rights, and Reporters sans Frontières all had been unable to enter Algeria since at least early 1998, despite having submitted requests to visit." (HRW 2000, Defending Human Rights)

"After four years of being refused access to Algeria by the authorities, Amnesty International was able to visit the country in May 2000. Amnesty International's delegates met with officials, human rights organizations, victims and families of victims, human rights lawyers and activists, and with associations and groups working on a variety of issues including women's rights and rehabilitation of victims of human rights abuses. During their visit, the delegation heard first-hand concerns expressed by hundreds of victims and their families, concerns which all too often have fallen on deaf ears, inside and outside the country." (AI 8 November 2000, Introduction)

"Une mission internationale de la FIDH, composée de Patrick Baudouin, avocat, président de la FIDH, Driss El Yazami, secrétaire général adjoint de la FIDH, vice-président de la Ligue française des droits de l'Homme, Siobhan Ni Chulachain, avocate, vice-présidente du Irish council for civil liberties, et Luis Guillermo Perez Casas, avocat, responsable du Colectivo de Abogados de Colombia, s'est rendue en Algérie à l'invitation du président Bouteflika, du 29 mai au 9 juin 2000, aux fins de s'informer sur la situation générale des droits de l'Homme dans ce pays.

C'est la première fois que la FIDH était ainsi autorisée, après plusieurs demandes demeurées vaines, à effectuer une telle mission depuis celle qu'elle avait réalisée fin avril 1997.

"La mission de la FIDH se félicite de l'invitation des autorités algériennes et du dialogue que a pu être développé à cette occasion. En revanche, elle déplore vivement la surveillance permanente et étroite dont elle a été l'objet malgré les engagements pris, et qui ne se justifient en aucun cas par des seules raisons 'sécuritaires'. La mission déplore également la désinformation et les attaques infondées qu'elle a eu à subir constamment de la part de certains organes de la presse privée dite 'indépendante', tout en saluant le traitement objectif réservé à son déplacement par quelques journalistes algériens." (FIDH July 2000, "Vérité, justice: entendre les victimes")

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

### National response

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#### **Algerian government response to human rights abuses has been one of denial; issue of displacement not even on agenda (1998-2000)**

- Algeria has denied there was a "crisis of human rights" in the country
- Government has ignored requests to cooperate with international human rights bodies and has refused visits of UN rapporteurs
- Government has failed to show concern for victims of human rights abuses, censoring information on the number and circumstances of violations through 1999
- New government has not initiated any investigations into alleged abuses
- Arab League supported Algeria's right to handle its internal affairs without interference in 1998

"On July 20-21, 1998, an Algerian government delegation met with the United Nations Human Rights Committee to discuss Algeria's second periodic report regarding its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In its oral presentation to the committee on July 20, the Algerian delegation insisted that 'there was no crisis of human rights in Algeria' but rather 'a terrorist phenomenon which violated human rights.' After its review, the committee, in unusually strong language, characterized the Algerian situation precisely as a 'widespread human rights crisis.'

[...]

The committee's report comes as the Algerian government continues to resist independent scrutiny of this 'widespread human rights crisis.' The authorities have stoutly refused to accede to the request of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson, that they cooperate with expert U.N. bodies such as the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions. The government has similarly ignored requests by independent international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International to conduct fact-finding missions relating to the most severe abuses. Such credible investigations are critical to ensure that the perpetrators of atrocities and human rights abuses do not continue to enjoy impunity and the victims are not compelled to live in a climate of fear." (HRW August 1998, Summary and Recommendations)

#### ***Algerian government not forthright in offering information on alleged abuses:***

"In Algeria the authorities have also for the most part failed to show due concern for the victims and their families. Throughout the worst years of the conflict, up to the middle of 1999, the Algerian authorities systematically censored the information about the real number of victims, giving artificially lower figures – less than half – and accusing those who provided accurate figures of deliberately exaggerating the seriousness of the

situation. This was seen by the families of the victims as the ultimate denial of their loss and of their grief.

Since the middle of 1999, the authorities have radically changed their discourse about the tragedy which has befallen the country, recognizing the magnitude of its scale and pledging to address the outstanding concerns which result from it. It might have been hoped that, more than a year after these promises were made and more than eight years after the killings began, some concrete action might have been taken to begin to address the multitude of unresolved cases.

Yet to date the Algerian authorities have not taken the necessary measures to convince victims and their families that serious efforts are being made to establish the truth in as many cases as possible and to identify those responsible for the crimes and bring them to justice. No thorough investigation is known to have been carried out by the Algerian authorities to establish the facts and uncover the truth about the killings of thousands of civilians in Algeria. Serious questions raised about the failure of the state to protect the civilian population, particularly at the time of the large-scale massacres of 1997 and 1998, have not been answered.

[...]

Extrajudicial executions have been widespread in Algeria since early 1994 after judicial executions were suspended by the authorities, yet for not one of the hundreds of cases of which Amnesty International is aware have the perpetrators been brought before a court and tried. Although reports of cases have substantially decreased in the last two years, dozens of people suspected of being members of, or of being linked to, armed groups have reportedly been extrajudicially executed during recent months and no investigations into these deaths, let alone judicial proceedings against those allegedly responsible, are known to have been carried out." (AI 8 November 2000, *The Need to Conduct Investigations*)

"The vast majority of human rights violations went unpunished in Algeria. Despite numerous requests, authorities never provided specific information to human rights organizations about how alleged abuses were handled; such information appeared only rarely in Algerian media. Algeria's report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee said that through December 1997, the courts had punished 128 members of the security forces and self-defense groups for "excesses in the performance of their duties," but provided no verifiable details. A U.N. delegation reported receiving official lists of such cases; these lists had not been reviewed by Human Rights Watch at the time this report went to press.

[...]

Algerians continued to 'disappear' during 1998. Despite official denials, evidence pointed to government responsibility in the many cases in which witnesses saw the victims being seized by groups of armed men they took to be security-force members, or in which family members heard unofficially that the missing person had been sighted in a detention facility." (HRW 1999, *Human Rights Developments*)

***In 1998, Algeria was supported by the Arab League in its refusal to cooperate with international bodies on the subject of human rights:***

"The Arab League denounced what it called biased campaigns launched by some international non-governmental human rights organizations against Algeria.

Moreover Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdul Meguid confirmed that all the Arab states are supporting Algeria in its refusal of interference in its interior affairs.

Abdul Meguid asserted that Algeria has the necessary organizations and democratic movements to solve its internal problems by itself." (ArabicNews 8 November 1998)

### **National human rights defenders face obstacles in conduct of their work (1999-2000)**

- Approximately 55 NGOs and associations working on different issues at national and local level
- Organizations which criticize government policy or actions face obstacles and restrictions
- Organizations concerned with human rights are particular targets of the government

"According to figures provided by officials in the Ministry of the Interior to Amnesty International there are about 55 NGOs and associations working on different issues at the national and local level. However, the 10 or so NGOs and associations or groups which have criticized or opposed the policies and actions of the government have faced and continue to face a range of problems and restrictions. Some have been refused legal registration by the national or local authorities and others, including legally recognized NGOs, have been refused the authorization to hold meetings and public events. Others found that the foreign guests they had invited to attend some of their activities were refused visas to enter Algeria. In addition, in the past year as in previous years, demonstrations organized by some of these associations were prevented from taking place or dispersed by security forces who ill-treated, intimidated, threatened or arrested the organizers and/or the participants.

[...]

The associations which face such problems and restrictions are mainly those whose actions concern human rights violations committed by security forces, as well as associations acting on behalf of victims and families of victims of armed groups and whose activities, previously tolerated and often encouraged, are now in opposition to the government policy – notably on the issue of the Civil Harmony law and the amnesty of armed group members.

[...]

Other NGOs which have been legally recognized for many years, such as the *Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme* (LADDH), Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights, and the *Rassemblement Action Jeunesse* (RAJ), Rally for Youth Action, have for years systematically been refused authorization to hold meetings, conferences or other public activities, and they are never allowed to use public halls, which are generally made available to other associations." (AI 8 November 2000, Restrictions on Freedom of Association and Expression for Victims and Human Rights Defenders)

"Although the 1989 Constitution allows NGOs, under some conditions, to operate freely, in practice NGOs, even when legalised, have been severely hindered if not blocked in their efforts to manage the conflict....Under these difficult circumstances some Algerian NGOs continued to operate, largely by advocating a peaceful solution to the conflict. They were supported by international NGOs which conducted fact-finding missions when possible, sent delegations and urged, on the one hand, the Algerian government and armed groups to respect basic human rights and, on the other hand, called upon the international community to launch an international inquiry into the violence." (EPCPT October 1999, Multi-Track Diplomacy)

***Some national NGOs working in the field of conflict management are described below:***

"The International Service for Human Rights and the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared Detainees gathered with the Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared of Algeria in a workshop on the 'disappeared' in Algeria held in September 1998. They submitted 477 dossiers of documented cases of 'disappearances' to the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. The Committee of Relatives of the Disappeared of Algeria is a loose organisation that has been active since the summer of 1998. Aided by Amnesty International and the Federation internationale des droits de l'homme (FIDH), it sent delegates to several European countries where they held conferences to draw attention to the problem of the 'disappeared'. The organisation also started to organise weekly demonstrations in Algeria which are attended by hundreds of mothers. A request by the Committee for formal recognition has been denied.

Another Algerian NGO involved in conflict management is the Rassemblement d'action jeunesse (RAJ), an organisation founded in 1992. The RAJ provided human rights education to youth all over the country, assisted them in searching for employment, and lobbied the government to start a dialogue between all the parties involved in the conflict. Following the first massacres in 1995, the RAJ produced a manifesto for peace and collected over 20,000 signatures in a few days. It has also organised an all-night concert for peace which was attended by more than 11,000 young people. The activities of the RAJ were subsequently curtailed by government forces despite its legal recognition in 1993.

Algeria has two major human rights organisations; the League algeriene pour les droits de l'homme (LADH) and the League algeriene pour la defense des droits de l'homme (LADDH). The difficult circumstances under which both organisations operate were highlighted in June 1994 when Yousef Fathallah, the president of the LADH was murdered. Both organisations claim complete independence but their members and activities are far from non-partisan. On several occasions Algerian intellectuals and politicians, including former Foreign Prime-Minister Mouloud Hamrouche, FIS-leader Abdelkader Hachani and LADDH president Ali Yahya, have made a 'call for peace' by issuing written statements. Numerous major mass demonstrations have taken place: in October 1994, in protest against the violence in general, in 1997 following the rigged

local elections, and in June 1998 in protest against the murder of Berber Rai-singer Matoub Lounes." (EPCPT October 1999, Multi-Track Diplomacy)

**Algerian Red Crescent Society (ARCS) has provided relief to attack victims throughout the conflict (1998)**

- Survivors of killings provided with first aid, relief distributions and counselling
- Survivors receive clothing, food and tents
- ARCS assists traumatized children

"The Algerian Red Crescent Society (ARCS) is providing assistance to the survivors of the killings in the form of first aid, relief distributions and psychological counselling. In a recent report to the Secretariat, the National Society indicates that since 1996 it has supplied assistance valued at over 22 million Algerian Dinars (CHF 528,000). In the first three weeks of this year, it has already distributed 26 tons of goods, chiefly foodstuffs and blankets.

Immediately after an attack, the Society in co-ordination with the public authorities, is responsible for giving emergency first aid to the wounded. Afterwards, it provides relief items for all survivors, including clothing, food, tents and household items, etc. and maintains distributions as long as necessary. Many people not only lose family members, often the breadwinner, in the attacks, but also have their homes and belongings destroyed. In the longer term, the Society also provides psychological counselling to survivors.

After the emergency phase, the ARCS, once again in co-operation with the competent public authorities, assists young children who witnessed the killings and have lost their families and homes. These children suffer deep psychological scars which require specialised care. Other ARCS aid includes the organisation of local holiday camps and financial assistance for rest and recovery stays in Algeria or abroad.

Algeria has a legal support system which compensates victims of terrorism in both the emergency and rehabilitation phases. Since this system is not able to cope with all the requests for assistance, the Algerian Red Crescent is considering establishing aid centres in areas affected by terrorism. They would be fully equipped to assist children suffering from post traumatic disorders. For adults, in addition to psychological counselling, the centres would make available skills training and help with the creation of small businesses, in order to encourage social reinsertion.

[...]

The Federation Secretariat has remained in regular contact with the ARCS ever since the beginning of the fighting in 1992. The Secretariat and a number of National Societies have offered assistance in the past but this has so far not been required by the ARCS." (IFRC 30 January 1998, Algeria: Information Bulletin no. 1)

**Algeria is party to all of the major human rights/humanitarian law treaties (2000)**

*Algeria has ratified the principal human rights treaties:*

Treaty	Acronym	Date of accession/ratification
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	ICCPR	12 September 1989
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	ICESCR	12 September 1989
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	CAT	12 September 1989
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	CERD	14 February 1972
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	CEDAW	22 May 1996
Convention on the Rights of the Child	CRC	16 April 1993
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	MWC	--
Optional Protocol to the ICCPR (Individual claims mechanism)	OPT	12 September 1989
Second Optional Protocol to the ICCPR (Abolition of the death penalty)	OPT2	--

(UN HCHR 16 November 2000)

*Algeria has also ratified the main humanitarian law instruments:*

Treaty ratifications/accessions
Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948)
Geneva Conventions (1949)
Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (1977)
Protocol II Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (1977)

(ICRC 2000)

For more information on Algeria's compliance with the ICCPR, see Human Rights Watch report of July 1998 [[Internet link](#)] and the UN Committee for Human Rights Concluding Observations of August 1998 following the submission of Algeria's report [[Internet link](#)].

## **International response**

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### **International reaction to the events in Algeria has been tempered (1998-2000)**

- Economic interest and fear of Islamist forces have limited international concern
- Priority has been accorded to containing the violence and maintaining the stability of the regime
- Belief exists in Europe that quiescence over past eight years has paid off

#### ***General:***

"Economic interest, support for the government and fear of Islamist forces have limited international concern about the appalling events in Algeria, though some initiatives were taken in response to new waves of civilian massacres at the end of 1997 and beginning of 1998. However, thousands more people were displaced by these and prospects for a resolution of the conflict are no nearer." (Dammers 1998, p. 180)

"Until now, European attitudes towards Algeria have tended to accord priority to maintaining the stability of the regime and to containing violence through tolerance of the regime's strong-armed strategy of eradicating the Islamic threat. Less attention has been paid that might have been hoped to addressing the crisis's root causes, despite formal support for political reform in the South Mediterranean region through the Barcelona Process. Instead, Europe has kept its distance, steadfastly avoiding becoming involved or using its leverage to influence the course of events within Algeria. In return, the Algerian regime has assumed responsibility for ensuring there has been no massive outward migration or spill-over of violence into Europe, and no disruption in the flow of crude oil and natural gas.

The problem is that, without external support and encouragement, the Algerian authorities will be tempted to assume that no fundamental change is required to address the underlying problems. At present, there is a belief in Europe that European quiescence over the past eight years has paid off, simply because now the acute crisis in Algeria appears to be waning. Yet without concerted action to address the causes of the conflict, there is a real risk that Algeria's civil conflict will simply revive in more pernicious forms in the future." (ICG October 2000, sect. 2C)

#### ***Multi- and bilateral reaction:***

##### **"EU**

The European Union (E.U.) was less engaged with Algeria on human rights issues than during 1998, when public horror at repeated massacres created pressure for action. The muted approach was attributable in part to the decline in violence, the favorable reception of President Bouteflika's early steps toward reform, and decidedly mixed reviews of the European démarches taken in 1998.

There were no high-profile E.U. missions such as the 1998 visits by a nine-member European Parliament delegation and by the junior foreign ministers of the troika (representing the preceding, current, and next presidents of the European Council), and no human rights hearings such as those held in the parliament in November 1997. However, shortly after Bouteflika's inauguration, the E.U. Presidency submitted a private letter to Algiers requesting information on a number of cases of "disappearances" and other abuses. No reply had been received as of the end of September [1999].

The European Parliament took a stand for press freedom in November 1998, at a moment when several of Algeria's private newspapers had been suspended. A resolution asked the European Commission to support all projects aimed at promoting press freedom and to consider such freedom as an essential element of E.U.-Algerian cooperation.

The E.U. made clear it would not push for resolutions critical of Algeria at the meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva in March-April. Instead, an E.U. statement delivered on March 31 [1999] welcomed Algeria's cooperation with the U.N. 'Panel of Eminent Persons' in 1998 while cautioning that 'its visit is not a substitute for cooperation with the procedures and mechanisms of the United Nations in the field of human rights....The E.U. urges Algeria to facilitate early visits of U.N. human rights mechanisms, particularly the U.N. special rapporteurs on torture and on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions and to give full effect to the [1998] concluding observations of the U.N. Human Rights Committee.' The statement said the E.U. 'continues to remain concerned over reports of involuntary disappearances...and calls upon the government to invite the [U.N.] Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances to visit the country...'

[...]

The European Commission approved a 57 million Euro financial agreement to support small and medium-scale Algerian enterprises. Under the European Commission's MEDA Democracy program, 10.3 percent of an approximate overall amount of 10 million Euros was allocated for various human rights and democracy projects in Algeria in 1998. At the time of this writing it was not possible to obtain the breakdown for 1999. However, the allocation of funds to projects in Algeria under the MEDA program had increased steadily since 1996, and the government of Algeria reportedly did not stand in the way of E.U. assistance to nongovernmental entities. Well over half of Algeria's exports and imports were with E.U. nations.

## France

France eagerly mended relations with Algeria during 1999, pleased to find in President Bouteflika a willing partner. Yet French enthusiasm with a 'new era' in bilateral relations was not colored by any public display of concern for governmental human rights abuses that remained systemic, albeit on a scale lower than in previous years.

Paris had remained quietly supportive of the Algiers government during the 1990s, despite strains caused by Algeria's internal strife and its spillover effects in France. Algeria's former ruler and its adversary in a brutal independence war, France was home

to the world's largest Algerian diaspora community. It remained the country with the closest links to Algeria and played the leading role in setting E.U. policy. France provided little direct bilateral aid but its generous credit guarantees helped to preserve its place as the leading exporter of goods to Algeria.

[...]

During this process, France indicated that it was working to address issues of concern to Algerians, including the ease of movement for Algerian citizens and air traffic between the two countries, and the reopening of closed French consulates. However, senior French officials avoided any public mention of human rights abuses committed by the state. Nor, in praising Bouteflika's peace plan, did they comment on how its durability might be affected by a failure to address grave violations.

#### United States

During the first half of the year, Washington remained restrained in seeking warmer ties in part because of Algeria's record of human rights abuses and manipulated elections. Algeria received no U.S. bilateral aid and for Washington paled in geopolitical significance next to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. The State Department's budget presentation to Congress for fiscal year 2000 maintained the U.S. has no 'vital' interests in Algeria, but said 'the transformation of this country into an open democracy, with a market economy would present the U.S. with major economic opportunities.'

Washington continued to encourage U.S. corporations to increase their stake in natural gas-rich Algeria. The U.S. Eximbank, which provides loans and loan guarantees to assist U.S. firms doing business abroad, had a level of exposure in Algeria that was second only to Saudi Arabia among Middle East and North African countries.

Public expressions of concern about human rights were not limited to the annual State Department Country Reports. Ambassador Cameron Hume spoke out publicly on several occasions. For example, he told *Le Matin* daily in an interview published December 28, 1998, the U.S. "wanted to see from Algeria greater severity toward security forces that are guilty of excesses...They must be brought to justice." He also urged authorities to publish a detailed list of "disappeared" persons, according to *Le Matin*.

The U.S. did not press these points during the March-April meeting of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva and, in contrast to the statements made by the E.U. in 1999 and by the U.S. itself in 1998, did not criticize Algeria's refusal to allow visits by U.N. human rights rapporteurs.

[...]

The U.S. proceeded to put its relations with Algeria under a ninety-day review. It held no high-level bilateral meetings and broadened its existing ban on licensing private-sector sales to Algeria of lethal weapons, extending it to other types of munitions. And, while the U.S. refrained from sending Bouteflika a congratulatory telegram, First Lady Hillary Clinton received two Algerian women whose children "disappeared" during the Algerian

strife, allegedly at the hands of security forces. This meeting, which took place three days after Bouteflika's inauguration, was widely reported in the Algerian press.

But Washington soon began to warm to Bouteflika. A meeting between the Algerian head of state and President Clinton at Moroccan King Hassan II's funeral in July was followed by other contacts. The U.S. maintained its policy of licensing no lethal weapon sales but resumed consideration, on a case-by-case basis, of commercial applications to sell other types of munitions to Algeria.

[...]

If the U.S. was pleased to see Bouteflika trying to resolve the armed conflict and talking with more candor than his predecessors about human rights problems, it remained to be seen whether continued improvement in bilateral relations would require his taking concrete actions to curtail institutionalized abuses and establish safeguards against their recurrence." (HRW 2000, The Role of the International Community)

#### **O.A.U. leadership has failed to play an effective role to stop the violence in Algeria (October 1999)**

"The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), of which Algeria is historically a highly influential member, has failed to play any role in efforts to stop the violence. In November 1994, its African Commission on Human and People's Rights adopted a resolution on Algeria, expressing concern about extra-judicial executions, torture and arbitrary detention and calling upon the world community to 'mobilize and support democratic forces in Algeria and abroad in their efforts to restore peace, the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Algeria'. However, this resolution was dropped in March 1995, undoubtedly as a result of Algerian pressure not to intervene in its domestic affairs. The Arab League has also refrained from making any attempt at conflict resolution. Instead, it has merely supported the Algerian government and accepted its stress on combating 'terrorism' with all means." (EPCPT October 1999, Official Conflict Management)

#### **A number of international human rights and humanitarian organizations have attempted to act in the Algerian context (October 1999)**

- Amnesty International has taken lead role in exposing human rights abuses
- Human Rights Watch and Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme have also been quite active
- International Crisis Group began monitoring the situation in Algeria at the end of 1997

"Amnesty International has taken the main initiative in exposing the scope of human rights violations by government forces and armed groups in Algeria. Until 1997, when the organisation was banned from entry, Amnesty International conducted fact-finding missions that were documented in several reports. Human Rights Watch and the FIDH

also conducted visits to Algeria to record human rights violations. An attempt by the FIDH to observe a trial in July 1997 failed when they were denied access to the court. Reporters sans frontières (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists also published reports. A delegation of the latter organisation, headed by CNN-reporter Peter Arnett, went in October 1998 on its first fact-finding mission and met with Communications' minister Habib Chawki, to discuss, amongst other cases, the 'disappearance' of two Algerian journalists and the suspension of permits for several daily newspapers. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both briefed the UN Human Rights Commission on the situation in Algeria. The organisations mentioned here issued joint statements in October 1997 and April 1998, in both cases to persuade the world community at large and the UN in particular to immediately launch an international inquiry into the violence.

In 1998 a group of leading Algerian and European intellectuals, including Pierre Bourdieu and historian Mohamed Harbi, formed the International Committee for Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Algeria. In an attempt to advise the UN panel led by Soares on which issues needed to be addressed during their visit, the Committee issued its first declaration just before the panel's departure for Algeria.

Numerous other international NGOs have called upon the Algerian government to end human rights violations and respect public liberties. They include the World Organisation against Torture, Article 19, the International Federation of Journalists, International Pen, the International Press Institute, and the World Press Freedom Committee.

The International Crisis Group began monitoring the situation in Algeria at the end of 1997 with the aim of identifying 'practical ways in which the international community can contribute to a lasting resolution of the Algerian crisis'. In March 1998 it issued its first report on Algeria. This contained a series of recommendations emphasising the importance of press freedoms.

The International Red Cross Committee has been unable to visit the country since 1992 due to restrictions imposed by the Algerian government. Other humanitarian organisations have also been denied the access needed to provide relief to victims of the conflict." (EPCPT 1999, Multi-Track Diplomacy)

### **Greatest international reaction to the Algerian situation came in 1998**

- Critical declarations by Kofi Annan and Mary Robinson in late 1997 set the stage for increased UN attention to country's human rights situation
- European Union became more engaged in the Algerian situation in 1998 than at any other time since eruption of crisis
- UN Human Rights Committee blasted Algeria for its poor human rights record in 1998

### ***General:***

"Algeria's human rights emergency provoked more international concern and diplomatic activity during 1998 than at any time since the violence became endemic in 1992. The catalyst for the international outcry was a series of large-scale massacres, officially attributed to armed Islamist groups but with disturbing evidence suggesting possible collusion by the security forces, including 'disappearances' and torture, also received a higher profile, due to the efforts of relatives of victims and their advocates, greater local press attention to these issues, the willingness of some deputies to raise them in parliament, and interventions by human rights groups and visiting foreign delegations.

[...]

Declarations in September 1997 by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson about the bloodshed in Algeria set the stage for increased, though wavering, U.N. attention to the country's human rights situation." (HRW 1999, Human Rights Developments and The Role of the International Community)

"Since 1992 over 100,000 people, many of them civilians, have been killed in Algeria but the international community and media have shown little concern for the vast majority of the victims. The interest of the outside world in the Algerian human rights crisis has remained sporadic and limited to killings of high-profile Algerians and of foreigners and to the large-scale massacres of 1997 and early 1998 in which hundreds of people were killed in a single night and which it would have been difficult to ignore." (AI 8 November 2000, The Need to Conduct Investigations)

### ***EU engagement:***

Beginning in late 1997, the E.U. became more engaged in the Algerian crisis than at any time since it erupted. During the year that followed, E.U. thinking evolved in a fashion that could only have pleased the Algerian authorities. E.U. officials and members of the European Parliament (M.E.P.s) spoke of the need to support the government's efforts to build democracy and fight terrorism, albeit 'within the rule of law and consistent with human rights.' A succession of European officials distanced themselves from two positions that Algiers viewed as inadmissible: allegations that the security forces were implicated in the massacres, and the call for an international inquiry into human rights violations. These shifts in thinking occurred even as Algiers tightly controlled the agenda and the movements of visiting E.U. troika and M.E.P. delegations and rejected frequent entreaties for greater transparency on human rights issues. Algiers also insisted that Europe's alleged tolerance of Algeria-linked terrorist networks rank high on the agenda of any bilateral discussion.

The human rights subcommittee of the European Parliament helped to focus attention on human rights by holding hearings on Algeria on November 24-25, 1997. The witnesses, from Algeria and international organizations, presented a wide range of views. On November 27 Foreign Minister Attaf appeared before the subcommittee. Asked about 'disappearances,' he replied, 'There are some, but less than you allege, and those cases are followed up.'

***UN Human Rights Committee criticism:***

"On July 20-21, 1998, an Algerian government delegation met with the United Nations Human Rights Committee to discuss Algeria's second periodic report regarding its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). In its oral presentation to the committee on July 20, the Algerian delegation insisted that 'there was no crisis of human rights in Algeria' but rather 'a terrorist phenomenon which violated human rights.' After its review, the committee, in unusually strong language, characterized the Algerian situation precisely as a 'widespread human rights crisis.'" (HRW August 1998, Summary and Recommendations)

"Amnesty International shares the grave concerns about the human rights situation in Algeria, expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee in their conclusions announced today, and welcomes the Committee's recommendations.

For the first time a UN mechanism, in expressing its concern about the serious human rights crisis, has issued concrete recommendations to the Algerian Government for measures it should take to stop and prevent grave violations, Amnesty International said.

If these recommendations are implemented this could certainly help to address the very grave human rights crisis in Algeria.

During the two-day examination of the Government report last week [July 1998], the Committee repeatedly expressed concern about the serious human rights crisis in Algeria and about violations by government forces, including disappearances, secret detention, torture and extrajudicial executions, and about the existence and role of militias armed by the state.

The Committee stated that: Widespread and indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, involving the loss of innumerable lives, and a general climate of violence heighten the responsibility of the State party to re-establish and maintain the conditions necessary for the enjoyment and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in Algeria." (AI 31 July 1998)

"In July, the U.N. Human Rights Committee, after scrutinizing the government's report and oral presentation on the state of civil and political rights covering 1992-98, delivered the most severe indictment ever by a U.N. body of Algeria's human rights practices. The committee declared that it was 'appalled at the widespread massacre of men, women and children in a great number of villages and towns,' and the sexual violence directed against women. It also expressed concern about the 'lack of timely or preventive measures of protection to the victims [of massacres] from police or military officials in the vicinity and at the persistent allegations of collusion of members of the security forces in terrorist attacks'; at the 'persistent allegations of systematic torture,' and at 'the failure of the State to respond adequately, or indeed at all' to 'disappearances.' The committee urged independent investigations into abuses and asked that 'access be given as soon as possible to the ICRC and other independent observers.'

The committee urged Algeria to conduct independent investigations, and 'in all cases of massacres to conduct an independent enquiry into the conduct of the security forces, from the lowest to the highest levels, and where appropriate, to subject them to penal and disciplinary sanctions.'" (HRW 1999, The Role of the International Community)

***The UN Human Rights Commission's strong criticism of Algeria's poor human rights record was not supported with additional comments by the UN "panel of eminent persons". For more information on the UN reaction to events in Algeria in 1998, see HRW 1999 Annual Report.***

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