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Algeria: Amnesty International denied access

An Amnesty International delegation was refused access to Algeria to go to observe the trial of the lawyer, Rachid Mesli, tomorrow at the court in Tizi Ouzou. This follows the denial of access to the organization to go to observe the trial of Abdelkader Hachani, a leader of the *Front islamique du salut*, FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) – banned in Algiers on 7 July.

The organization had undertaken the necessary procedures to obtain visas for its delegates as soon as the dates for the trials were set, but the Algerian Government did not respond and its embassies refused to deliver the visas.

“We very much regret this refusal by the Algerian authorities who keep reiterating their willingness to cooperate with human rights organizations,” Amnesty International said today.

This is not the first time that the Algerian authorities have denied access to Amnesty International. The organization had planned to send a delegation to carry out research at the beginning of the year, but the government replied that this was not possible – without giving any further explanation.

Amnesty International has nevertheless welcomed the fact that, for the first time since 1992, other international human rights organizations such as the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and Human Rights Watch were able to go to Algeria to carry out research into the situation of human rights and civil liberties.

However, since 1992 no human rights organization has been able to observe any trial in Algeria. Last April delegates from Human Rights Watch who were visiting Algeria were prevented from attending the trial of lawyer, Ali Zouita, at the court in Algiers. When the delegates arrived, the president of the court declared the hearing *in camera*, and even the accused’s families were not allowed to attend the trial.

Already in 1992 Amnesty International and other organizations and international media were prevented from attending the trial of the FIS leaders before a military court.

“On the one hand the Algerian authorities keep criticizing our reports on the human rights situation in Algeria, and often claim that we have not taken into account their position. On the other hand, however, they have systematically refused to provide to us with the information and documents we have requested, and they have now been refusing us access to the country for some time,” Amnesty International said.

Over the past few years the organization has continued to carry out research into the human rights situation and has repeatedly condemned the abuses committed by security forces and government-backed militias, as well as those committed by armed opposition groups which define themselves as “Islamic groups”.

In addition to the reports it has published Amnesty International has sent dozens of letters to the Algerian authorities requesting information and raising its concern about specific cases, as well as patterns of human rights violations. Unfortunately to date the authorities have continued to criticize our reports without however responding to the organizations’ correspondence.

“We call on the Algeria authorities to translate into practice their repeatedly stated commitment to human rights, by allowing our delegates free access to Algeria to carry out research into the human rights situation,” Amnesty International said.
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