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Algeria: Newly discovered mass grave must be fully investigated

Following the discovery of another mass grave on Thursday, Amnesty International calls on the Algerian authorities to fully investigate the site and to treat previously unearthed graves similarly.

"Urgent measures must be taken to preserve the evidence at the site, to identify the victims and establish the truth about these killings," said Amnesty International. "The Algerian authorities must also use available evidence to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice in fair trials."

According to Algerian security sources, the grave contains more than a dozen bodies of victims of killings committed by an armed group during the mid-1990s.

In recent months, Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern about the failure of the Algerian authorities to investigate mass grave sites in line with international standards, raising fears that evidence of grave human rights abuses has been lost.

Algeria faces a massive problem of impunity for crimes against humanity committed by armed groups, security forces and state-armed militias since 1992. Tens of thousands of people have been killed, but to date almost no investigations into these abuses have taken place. The treatment of mass graves epitomizes the failure of the Algerian authorities to concretely address the legacy of violence and causes distress and anxiety among victims of human rights abuses.

This is felt particularly by the families of thousands of people who have been abducted by armed groups during the last decade and are presumed to have been assassinated by them, but whose bodies have never been found.

"The Algerian authorities should make every effort to identify the bodies found in the mass grave and to allow the families of the victims to bury their relatives with dignity."

Background

Since 1998, at least a dozen mass graves have been discovered in Algeria, some containing the remains of scores of people believed to have been killed by armed groups. Although the authorities have generally exhumed the mortal remains found in these graves, to Amnesty International's knowledge, only a few have been identified.

In the case of mass graves that are believed to contain victims of state abuses the authorities have generally not proceeded to exhumations. Sites in the western province of Relizane were reportedly

destroyed in an apparent attempt to cover up abuses by state-armed militias. The authorities seem to have made no effort to prevent this.

Amnesty International calls on the Algerian authorities to ensure that exhumations at mass grave sites and ensuing investigations are carried out in line with international standards, in particular the UN Model Protocol for Disinterment and Analysis of Skeletal Remains, which provides detailed guidelines for governments to follow when exhuming human remains.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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