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Algeria: Amnesty International concludes visit: Promise of change but human rights issues remain unresolved

An Amnesty International delegation, returning after a two and a half year absence, concluded a two-week visit to Algeria.

The delegation met with government officials in the Ministries of Interior, Justice and Education, with the official human rights commission, representatives of human rights and women's associations, and with victims of human rights violations and their relatives in Algiers and other parts of the country. The delegation presented its findings at a press conference in Algiers on 27 February.

Recalling its last visit in November 2000, the delegation noted more open space for public debate and engagement with human rights issues in the country. In frank discussion with government officials, the delegation was informed of a series of reforms being planned and gradually implemented at many levels with the stated intention of moving towards greater transparency and the rule of law.

"These planned reforms may signal an important development in the long-term protection of human rights in Algeria," said Roger Clark, leader of the delegation, "but the effectiveness and legitimacy of this promise of change would be undermined if past and continuing human rights violations remain unresolved, and if existing safeguards against such violations as torture and secret detention are not scrupulously implemented."

The Amnesty International delegation expressed concern that civilians continue to be killed, albeit at lower levels than in previous years. Torture remains prevalent and systematic in nearly all cases involving alleged links to what the government describes as "terrorist" activities. Thousands of families continue to suffer the agony of not knowing the fate of relatives who were arrested by security forces or abducted by armed groups or state-armed militias over the past decade.

Impunity remains one of Amnesty International's grave concerns. The delegation noted a continuing failure to adequately investigate human rights violations and to bring to justice the perpetrators of past and ongoing violations.

"We are calling on the authorities to urgently turn their attention to these continuing serious concerns. The families of victims deserve an end to the anguish of uncertainty, and cannot wait for the promise of long-term reform to be realized."

For interviews with the delegation please contact the press office on +44 20 7413 5566

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