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APPEAL CASE – ALGERIA TORTURE OF BRAHIM LADADA AND ABDELKRIM KHIDER

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Torture to extract confessions

Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider¹, both shopkeepers in their early 30s living in the coastal town of Dellys, north-eastern Algeria, were brutally tortured in detention earlier this year by the Algerian security forces. During their ordeal they were allegedly forced into making statements dictated to them by their torturers, in which they confessed to having links with, on the one hand, an armed group and, on the other, an Algerian human rights lawyer living in exile in Switzerland. Amnesty International believes that Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider may have been arrested and tortured because they had passed reports of human rights violations committed by the security forces to this lawyer.

Arrest and detention

Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider, who are friends and neighbours of each other, were arrested at their homes on the afternoon of 23 March 2002. According to their families, both men were arrested within an hour of each other by plain-clothes security agents, accompanied by policemen in uniform from the local police station in Dellys. No arrest warrant was shown for either man and no reason given for their arrests, despite these procedures being required by Algerian law. Both their houses were searched after the arrest.

¹ The arrest and detention of the two men are mentioned in an Amnesty International Urgent Action of 24 April 2002 (AI Index: MDE 28/012/2002). In the document, Brahim Ladada is referred to as Fateh, the name his family use for him. Brahim is the name on his birth certificate.

Algerian law stipulates that as soon as the authorities decide to keep an arrested person in custody, they must make available to them all means allowing them to communicate immediately with their families and to receive visits from them. Neither Brahim Ladada nor Abdelkrim Khider was allowed to do this.

Not knowing where their relatives had been taken, the families of the two men contacted the local police authorities, who told them that the two men had been transferred to a Military Security base in Ben Aknoun, near the capital, Algiers, some 200kms west of Dellys. The police were not able or willing to provide the families with the reason for the arrests, however, and the families were not permitted to visit their relatives at the military security base.

Torture ordeal

Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider were held at the Military Security base in Ben Aknoun for around 12 days, the maximum period, under Algerian law, for detainees to be held without charge before seeing a magistrate. While in detention at the base and in the absence of visits from family, lawyer or medical professionals, the two men were reportedly tortured repeatedly. They were allegedly undressed completely and kept in this state throughout their time at the Military Security base. They have said that, on several occasions, they were beaten with batons and plastic pipes and also tortured by the so-called *chiffon* method, in which a rag is forced into the mouth and dirty water, containing detergent and other impurities, poured

through it to fill up the stomach.

Military Security

Military Security, or *Sécurité militaire* in French, is the name of a security service more formally known as the *Département de renseignement et sécurité* (DRS), Department of Information and Security. The service has repeatedly been accused of committing gross human rights violations, such as torture, extrajudicial executions and “disappearances”, during the current conflict. The authorities have however failed to investigate such allegations. Amnesty International has received reports indicating that dozens of the some 4,000 Algerians who have “disappeared” since 1993 were held at some point in secret detention at the military security base in Ben Aknoun. Many are believed to have been tortured there.

Transfer to prison

Following their ordeal at the Military Security base in Ben Aknoun, the two men were reportedly brought before a magistrate and charged with belonging to an “armed terrorist group” and with praising its actions. They were then transferred to Serkadji Prison in Algiers. The families were not informed of this transfer and only found out about it some five days later, when the family of another detainee at the prison happened to tell them that the two men had been seen there.

Human rights lawyer implicated

Rachid Mesli, the Algerian human rights lawyer they had been in contact with in Switzerland, was charged in his absence with belonging to an “armed terrorist group” operating abroad. An international arrest warrant for him was issued and news of this was published widely in the Algerian and international press.

Rachid Mesli worked with great courage throughout the most difficult years of the current conflict as a human rights lawyer in Algeria, despite repeated harassment and intimidation from the authorities on account of his work defending victims of human rights violations by the state. In particular, he spent three years in jail after being sentenced in a grossly unfair trial accused of complicity with an armed group. He was adopted by Amnesty

International as a prisoner of conscience. In 2000, fearing for his safety and that of his wife and young children, he sought refuge in Switzerland, where he continues to campaign for the protection of human rights in Algeria.

Torture in Algeria

Although the number of reported cases of torture decreased markedly in Algeria around three years ago, as fewer political arrests were made, Amnesty International has since then continued to receive accounts from dozens of people who have been subjected to torture or ill-treatment in custody. Many were arrested on suspicion of being linked to armed groups or of being involved in anti-government protests. Human rights lawyers inside the country believe that reported cases of torture may represent only the tip of the iceberg since many victims of torture never talk about their cases, fearing that reporting violations will only exacerbate their predicament or expose family members to reprisals from the authorities. It is during secret detention that detainees are most at risk of being subjected to torture, ill-treatment or “disappearance”.

What can you do?

You can write to the Algerian Minister of Justice, in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider were tortured in custody, and urging the authorities to guarantee that the men will not suffer any further harm;
- asking that any allegations of torture or ill-treatment be investigated promptly and independently and that the men are given all medical attention they may require;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that both men will be tried in accordance with international standards for fair trial, given that since 1992 thousands of Algerians have been convicted in unfair trials on vague and generalized accusations of links with “terrorism”.

Algerian Minister of Justice

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