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Algeria: Amnesty International condemns massacres of civilians

Amnesty International today condemned in the strongest terms the recent killings and massacres in Algeria that have claimed the lives of more than 100 civilians, including women and children, in the past week alone. Recent days have seen a significant increase in the level of violence in the North African state, with dozens of members of security forces, state-armed militias and armed groups also killed.

"The killing has to stop," the human rights organization said. "The Algerian authorities should spare no effort to investigate these crimes and to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice. They must instigate measures to ensure that the civilian population is protected."

On the night of 18-19 December, a group of men armed with knives and axes entered a coastal village near Ténès, west of Algiers, and hacked to death 22 men, women and infant children before decapitating their bodies. Two nights previously at least 16 schoolchildren, aged between 15 and 18, and their supervisor were shot dead in the dormitory of their boarding school in the town of Medea, 80 kms south of the capital. On both these occasions the perpetrators managed to escape without being apprehended. The same is true for virtually all other such incidents.

"The authorities must ensure that full, impartial and independent investigations are carried out into these and all other outstanding cases," Amnesty International said. "These killings must not be allowed to join the long list of unsolved crimes. Those responsible for these horrific murders must be held to account."

Although the international community has largely tended to ignore the continuing high level of violence in Algeria, an average of between 200 and 300 people have been killed every month throughout this year. Some have been civilians killed in deliberate and indiscriminate attacks carried out by armed groups calling themselves "Islamic groups". Others have been members of the security forces, state-armed militias and armed groups killed in attacks, ambushes and armed confrontations.

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