



TRADE UNION ACTION

focus on ALGERIA

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ACTION 1998

Abdelhak Benhammouda, leader of the Algerian workers'

Hundreds of trade unionists killed

Among the thousands of civilians slaughtered in Algeria's bloody conflict, some 50 trade unionists were killed in 1996¹ and killings have continued in 1997 and 1998. Tragically, the killings have often been arbitrary and indiscriminate with no real reason why certain people were targeted. However, with an estimated 400 trade unionists among the 80,000 or more victims killed since 1992, Algeria is in a state of terror for labour activists and virtually all ordinary citizens alike. Three national trade union secretaries have been assassinated.

The leaders of the country's main labour union, *Union Generale des Travailleurs Algeriens* (UGTA), like the Algerian authorities, blame all the killings on the armed islamist opposition groups. But the security forces also, are responsible for many deaths. Summary killings by the security forces seem to be increasingly used as an alternative to arrest or as a form of punishment. Amnesty International with the Federation International des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), Human Rights Watch and Reporters Sans Frontieres are calling for an impartial international investigation into the human rights abuses in Algeria. This was supported by UNICEF and many other human rights organisations have endorsed similar joint national public statements.

Time for action an international investigation

For years the cries for help of victims in Algeria and the efforts of human rights organizations to draw attention to the human rights crisis in Algeria have received little or no response. This indifference must not continue.

Amnesty International is calling for an **international investigation** into the recent massacres and other human rights abuses to **establish facts, examine allegations of responsibility, and make recommendations** on steps to **bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice.**



union, UGTA, was shot dead on 28 January 1997. On 12 February security forces killed 8 people, including 2 women and 2 small children and then announced that the "assassins" of Abdelhak Benhammouda had been killed.

Later, on **23 February, national television showed Rachid Medjahed**, who had been arrested on 15 February, confessing to having been the leader of the group who killed Abdelhak Benhammouda.

"Assassin" died before going on TV say authorities

On 3 April Rachid Medjahed's family found his body riddled with bullets in a morgue, but the Algerian authorities, including the Minister of Justice himself, kept insisting that Rachid Medjahed was alive. In May the authorities finally admitted that Rachid Medjahed was dead. They said he had died on 18 February from bullet wounds sustained at the time of arrest. Yet he did not look injured when he appeared on television on 23 February, and those who saw him in detention said that he had not been injured at the time of his arrest.

Amnesty International has called for an independent and impartial inquiry into the killings of Abdelhak Benhammouda and Rachid Medjahed (cont)

General Secretary shot dead

Massacres & killings continue UN experts & media barred

Since the beginning of the conflict in 1992 tens of thousands of people have been killed; victims of violence by both armed groups and security services. Massacres, murders, extrajudicial executions, torture, abductions and "disappearances" are a daily reality for the Algerian population. These crimes continued during and after visits to Algeria by European Union delegations and European parliamentarians.

To date no independent and impartial inquiry has been carried out by the Algerian authorities, who continue to oppose an international investigation and who accuse those who have expressed concern at the lack of protection for the civilian population of "interference".

For almost a year the Algerian authorities have not allowed any international human rights organization to go to Algeria to carry out research on the ground, and the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Torture and on Extrajudicial Executions continue to be refused access to the country despite the "agreement in principle" publicly given by the Algerian authorities a long time ago. Many foreign journalists to date remain unable to obtain visas to Algeria and those who are allowed into the country are under constant surveillance by security forces.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION of HUMAN RIGHTS



ON DECEMBER 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the full text of which appears in the following pages. Following this historic act the Assembly called upon all Member countries to publicize the text of the Declaration and "to cause it to be disseminated, displayed, read and expounded principally in schools and other educational institutions, without distinction based on the political status of countries or territories."

Questions remain over Benhammouda / Medjahed killings

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Were the government authorities hiding the truth when they claimed that Rachid Medjahed was alive several weeks after his death in police custody?
Or are the judicial authorities no longer able to supervise the security services?
Has the rule of law broken down to such an extent?
Why was the only person who might have clarified the murder of Abdelhak Benhammouda killed in police custody ?

Government backed UGTA strike

Reuters News Agency reported that "the UGTA led a general strike, which spared the vital oil and gas facilities, in 1991 with the clear backing of the government keen to strengthen the union appeal among workers against a then nascent radical union backed by Islamists." (11.44 100298GMT)

More recently the UGTA organised a one-day public protest against privatisations, lay-offs and delays in payment of wages, with workers in steel-making, electronic, mechanical and metal sectors on 9 March 98.

No reports of any police interference.
But a strike called by Socialist Forces Front (FFS) on 12 February during a visit by a delegation from the European Union was faced by police trucks despite the fact that they were calling for a "political solution" to the crisis, to denounce "terrorism and violence" and "impose peace and national reconciliation".

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

As well as articles on freedom of expression, the right to a fair trial and against ill-treatment, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also describes other fundamental rights for workers and trade-unionists:

‘Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.’

Article 20 UDHR

‘Everyone has the right to work...
Everyone has the right to form and to
join trade unions’ Article 2



‘Everyone has the right to a standard
of living adequate for... health and
well-being’ Article 25

Amnesty International first sought mass public support
for an international investigation into human rights
violations in Algeria with an Urgent Action in 1997

saying: "In Algeria, political
killings, "disappearances", torture,
secret detentions, abductions and
death threats have become routine.

Thousands of men, women, children
and elderly people have been



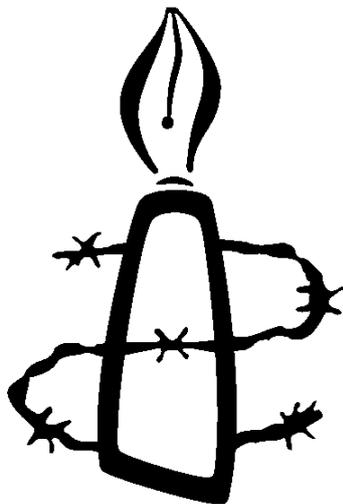
slaughtered, hacked to death, decapitated, mutilated, shot and burned alive in their
homes; pregnant women have been disembowelled, children and babies thrown off
balconies. Up to 80,000 people have been killed in almost six years of conflict"

countless other people are pledging to do
everything in their power to promote the
human rights proclaimed in the
Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Find out more about the **Journey of the
Book**

from your national Amnesty office.
action*action*action*action*action*

Now, in many parts of the world there are joint
campaigns to end the massacres, killings and barbarity
in Algeria. Please help us sustain the campaign. AI is
seeking backing, information and support for this action
not only from trade unions, but from the general public,
from businesses, churches, political parties and
organisations of every sort.



**GET UP
SIGN UP**

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The core International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is a
body of the United Nations. Through its tri-partite
conferences with governments, employers and
workers organisations it has built up and monitors
sets of standards, in the form of Conventions &
Recommendations relating to freedom of association,
the right to form and join trade unions, and other
working conditions.

Algeria: Conventions 87 & 98 Ratified

Algeria ratified ILO Convention 98 on the Right to
Organise and Collective Bargaining in 1962. This
says that workers' organisations should enjoy
protection against any interference.

Algeria ratified ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of
Association and Protection of the Right to Organise
also in 1962, this establishes the right of workers to
establish organisations of their own choosing and to run
them without undue interference.

Sadly these measures have not prevented trade
unionists and workers, women and men in almost
every occupation as well as children and people
from all walks of life from being killed, tortured and
disappeared.

The core ILO conventions

Sign your name in, and circulate within
your trade union, the books in which

no. 87 - the right to freedom of association
no. 98 - the right to organise and to bargain collectively
nos. 29 & 105 - the prohibition of all forms of forced labour

no. 100 - the right to equal pay for work of equal value
no. 111 - the freedom from discrimination in respect of employment/occupation
no. 138 - the minimum working age

WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can help the campaign to stop the massacres, killings and other violations of human rights in Algeria

Amnesty International has published other, more detailed reports about Algeria. Contact the section office of Amnesty International in your country. The office may have other material such as video, press articles, speakers for meetings etc.

Ask trade union members to support a resolution calling for an international inquiry into the violations in Algeria.

Send letters, faxes and emails to your government, to your country's representative at the UN Commission on Human Rights, to your Parliamentary representatives, to your country's representative at the European Parliament, the Organisation of African Unity

Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Your government's language.

APPEALS TO: Your government's Minister of Foreign Affairs
Urge your government to support the call for an international investigation into the killings in Algeria and please stress that they cannot be accepted as an "internal affair" for the government of Algeria alone, nor can they be ignored on grounds of Algeria's national sovereignty.

COPIES TO: Your government's representative at the United Nations
Your elected representatives at national level
Local press and broadcast media

Organise a public meeting about the situation in Algeria

Draw up and issue a statement for the press and public, invite other organisations to support the call for an international investigation.

Take part in Amnesty International's GET-UP, SIGN UP campaign to mark the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998:

Spread the message within your work-place and community:

Ask your trade-union to distribute copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to each of its members, so we can all be aware of the rights to which we are entitled.

Contact your national office of Amnesty International to find out more.

Ask your trade union nationally and locally to work with Amnesty International on the cases of victimised Trade Unionists and others targeted because of their work fighting for trade union rights.