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FOUR INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS CALL ON THE UN COMMISSION TO FACE UP TO ITS RESPONSIBILITY ON ALGERIA

Joint press release by Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Sans Frontières

GENEVA -- There are only seven working days left before the end of the UN Commission on Human Rights and to date no action on Algeria has even been proposed, let alone taken. Meanwhile, in Algeria children continue to be hacked to death, women are abducted and raped, men are arrested at home and "disappear" in the night. Today, Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Sans Frontières are holding a joint briefing to call on the UN Human Rights Commission to take action on Algeria.

Six years of violence have left tens of thousands of people dead. Six years is a long time for the Commission to remain a silent spectator to a human rights crisis whose magnitude has only sporadically grabbed international attention.

"How many more dead will it take for the Commission to stop turning a blind eye to the plight of the Algerian victims? It is time for members of the Commission to stop posturing. Too many excuses have been invoked to justify inaction by the Commission; and such inaction is tantamount to discriminating against victims of the Algerian tragedy," said Pierre Sané, Secretary General of Amnesty International.

It should not be a forlorn hope to expect the UN body with primary responsibility for the protection and promotion of human rights to face up to its responsibility and to take effective action to address the human rights situation in Algeria.

"We do not pretend that the appointment of a Special Rapporteur and the setting up of an international investigation will be enough to resolve the crisis, but we insist that it is a crucial and necessary step to break the cycle of violence and impunity which reigns in Algeria today. What we are calling for is both practical and necessary," stated Joanna Weschler, Representative at the UN of Human Rights Watch. "It is not something abstract. It is about saving lives. Each member state of the Commission bears a heavy responsibility if this session ends and nothing has been done", added Joanna Weschler.

Since the beginning of the Commission four weeks ago, hundreds of people have been killed in Algeria, torture continues and the relatives of the "disappeared" are still wondering if their loved ones are dead or alive. At the same time the Algerian Government continues to refuse access to the country to the UN Special Rapporteurs as well as to international human rights organizations.

"The widespread use of extrajudicial practices has led to the institutionalized destruction of the rule of law. To date no concrete action has been taken by the Algerian authorities to redress the situation and the perpetrators of crimes and abuses continue to benefit from impunity. In the light of this, action by the Commission is necessary, and the Algerian Government is obliged, under international law, to cooperate with the Commission in this regard", said Patrick Baudouin, President of the International Federation of Human Rights.

Robert Menard, Secretary General of Reporters Sans Frontières stated that “The systematic control on information by the authorities provides a cover of impunity for armed groups and security forces, who are responsible for massive human rights abuses. To date no one has been brought to justice for the assassination of some 60 journalists; if most of the journalists are believed to have been killed by armed groups, some of them were not killed by armed groups, but probably by groups close to certain circles within the authorities”. Robert Menard added that “Journalists continue to be prosecuted on charges of ‘attacking state security’ or ‘insulting state authorities’, and access to Algeria for foreign journalists is restricted or refused and those who are allowed into the country are forced to work under security forces surveillance”.

Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, Human Rights Watch and Reporters Sans Frontières are calling on the Commission on Human Rights to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Algeria who – supported by relevant thematic mechanisms of the Commission as well as other technical experts – should carry out urgent on-site visits and report to the Commission with recommendations for further action. This would be an initial step to address the situation and to ensure long-term transparency and scrutiny.
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