

Amnesty International

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Algeria and Morocco/Western Sahara: Show your commitment to combating enforced disappearance

Ahead of the 27th International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August 2010, Amnesty International wrote to the Algerian and Moroccan authorities urging them to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance without any further delay.

In its letters to the Algerian and Moroccan ministers of foreign affairs, respectively Mourad Medelci and Taib Fassi Fihri, Amnesty International urged them to remember the victims of enforced disappearance and honour their memory by taking concrete steps to ensure that enforced disappearances will never again be tolerated.

In Algeria, thousands of individuals were subjected to enforced disappearances at the hands of the security forces or state-armed militias during the 1990s internal conflict, which was marred by serious human rights abuses committed by both security forces and armed groups. While the National Advisory Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (Commission nationale consultative de promotion et de protection des droits de l'Homme, CNCPPDH) estimates the number of victims to reach up to 7,000; families of victims, associations representing them and other NGOs believe the numbers to be higher than 8,000. Many of the victims were suspected of being members or sympathizers of the banned Islamic Salvation Front. Instead of investigating these disappearances and bringing those responsible to justice, the Algerian authorities introduced a series of amnesty measures since 1999 that entrench a climate of impunity in the name of "national peace and reconciliation".

Moroccan security forces were also responsible for hundreds of enforced disappearances between the mid-1960s and early 1990s - a period known as the "years of lead" and characterized by widespread human rights violations including enforced disappearances. Moroccan victims of enforced disappearance included activists in opposition parties, trade unionists and even farmers who led anti-government demonstrations. Sahrawis were disproportionately victimized. Many disappeared due to their real or perceived support for the independence of Western Sahara, a territory Morocco annexed in 1975. The Moroccan authorities took a number of important steps to address enforced disappearances, including through the establishment and work of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (Instance Équité et Réconciliation, IER). However, to date the full truth about all enforced disappearances has not been revealed and justice has not been addressed.

The failure of the Algerian and Moroccan authorities to fully address their legacy of enforced disappearances, leaves thousands of families not knowing the exact fate of their relatives. Amnesty International supports these families in their calls for truth, justice and adequate reparation, which includes guarantees of non-repetition.

While the Algerian and Moroccan authorities have been trumpeting that a new page has been turned, one very concrete way to combat enforced disappearances is to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which the UN General Assembly adopted in 2006. The Convention is today one ratification away from entering into force. It will then become an effective instrument to help prevent enforced disappearances, establish the truth about the crime, punish the perpetrators and provide reparations to the victims and their families.

Even though Algeria and Morocco signed the Convention more than three years ago, they have failed to take any steps to ratify it. Amnesty International reiterates its calls on the Algerian and Moroccan authorities to show their real commitment to combating enforced disappearances by ensuring that the Convention enters into force.

For more information on disappearances in Algeria, see

Amnesty International, *Legacy of impunity: A threat to Algeria's future* (AI Index: 28/001/2009), April 2009

Amnesty International, *Algeria: Legacy of impunity threatens future* (AI Index: 28/003/2009)

For more information on disappearances Morocco/Western Sahara, see:

Amnesty International, *No More Half Measures: Addressing enforced disappearances in Morocco and Western Sahara* (AI Index: 29/005/2009), August 2009

Amnesty International, *Broken Promises: The Equity and Reconciliation Commission and its follow-up* (AI Index: 29/001/2010), January 2010