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Algeria: Evidence of persistent torture by the Military Security in secret locations

Beatings, electric shocks and the forced ingestion of dirty water, urine and or chemicals are just some of the methods that continue to be used by Algeria's security forces with systematic impunity, Amnesty International revealed in a report published today.

Based on a series of case studies collected between 2002 and 2006, the report shows how the "war on terror" is serving as an excuse to perpetuate torture and ill-treatment by Algeria's "Military Security" intelligence agency, officially known as the Department for Information and Security (Département du renseignement et de la sécurité, DRS).

"As a first step, President Bouteflika should acknowledge the disturbing allegations of abuse documented in this report and publicly commit to investigating them. He must also ensure that DRS officers no longer arrest or detain suspects and that any responsible for torture or mistreatment of detainees are promptly brought to justice," said Malcolm Smart, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Amnesty International.

The report, *Unrestrained powers: Torture by Algeria's Military Security*, examines several cases of torture or other ill-treatment by the DRS in secret detention centres without access to lawyers, independent doctors, family, or any civilian oversight.

A number of countries, including Canada, France, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands and Spain have forcibly returned individuals suspected of terrorist activities to Algeria despite the fact that it is the DRS that usually detains and interrogates such individuals. Although the civilian authorities exercise no control over the conduct and practices of the DRS, the UK government has also sought agreement under which Algerian nationals could be forcibly returned on the basis of "diplomatic assurances" that they would not be tortured.

Interrogation reports established by the DRS appear to be routinely used as evidence in court while the lack of investigations into claims of torture and other ill-treatment in Algeria is a long-standing concern of Amnesty International.

Successive measures taken by the authorities to bring closure to a decade of internal conflict, in which up to 200,000 people were killed and several thousand more "disappeared", have failed to address pressing human rights concerns and have granted wide-ranging impunity to perpetrators.

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern about these measures. Its principal concern relates to the fact that a February 2006 amnesty law provided impunity for crimes under international law, including torture committed by the DRS.

"The persistent denial of the Algerian authorities of the widespread abuse that has taken place is an indication that Algeria has some way to go in combating torture and other ill-treatment," said Malcolm Smart. "The authorities should address the grim legacy of the past and ensure that perpetrators of torture are punished."

The report makes a series of recommendations to the Algerian government including:

- DRS officers should no longer be allowed to arrest or detain suspects, given the persistence of allegations of torture perpetrated by DRS and the lack of any effective oversight over the arrest and detention procedures of the DRS;
- legislation should be amended to ensure that anyone who is taken into detention will be granted prompt access to a lawyer;
- legal provisions introduced in February 2006 that contravene Algeria's obligation to investigate and punish torture and ill-treatment and criminalize free expression about state abuses should be repealed.

In addition, Amnesty International calls on foreign governments to halt the forcible return of individuals to Algeria if they would be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment, end the use of "diplomatic assurances", ensure that evidence obtained under torture in Algeria is not used in court proceedings and that anyone arrested in Algeria at their request is not detained by the DRS.

For a copy of the report, *Unrestrained powers: Torture by Algeria's Military Security*, please see:
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde280042006>

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