

8 January 1998

Further information on UA 362/97 (MDE 28/39/97, 19 November 1997) - Massacres / Killings / "Disappearances" / Abductions / Torture

ALGERIA Hundreds more killed in recent massacres

Hundreds more people are reported to have been killed in recent weeks in Algeria, as the authorities there continue to resist all calls for international investigations into the massacres.

According to reports in the Algerian press, up to 412 people, many of them women and children, were killed in four villages in Algeria's western region of Relizane on 30 December 1997. As in previous similar massacres, the victims reportedly had their throats cut before being decapitated. Some were reportedly dismembered and babies were smashed against the walls of the houses. The toll announced by the Algerian authorities was of 78 dead and 73 wounded.

One hundred and seventeen civilians were reportedly killed on 4 January 1998 in another village in the Relizane region. According to a newspaper, there were no survivors in the village. Other massacres were also reported in the western Tiaret region and in Medea, 80 kilometres south of Algiers. Some 30 people were killed in two more attacks in western Algeria and in Algiers, a newspaper and witnesses said on 8 January.

The tolls announced by the authorities are always much lower than those reported by the media and by eyewitnesses as the authorities seek to play down the gravity of the human rights crisis in Algeria. The authorities maintain censorship on "security-related" information; Amnesty International has been denied access to the country since June 1996.

Thousands of civilians have been killed in similar massacres in the past year alone. All the killings have been blamed on the armed groups by the authorities.

Yet, many massacres have taken place in close proximity to army barracks and security forces outposts, and on no occasion have the army or security forces intervened to stop or prevent the killings or to arrest those responsible. There is also growing concern, from testimonies of survivors and eyewitnesses, that death squads working in collusion with, and under the protection of, certain units or factions of the army, security forces, and state-armed militias, may have been responsible for some of the massacres.

Since the beginning of the conflict the armed groups have claimed responsibility for several of the massacres. Their claims are impossible to verify and the authorities have failed to carry out any investigations and to bring the perpetrators to justice. Even though no-one has claimed responsibility for the recent massacres, in December some of the armed groups had announced their plans to carry out killings during the month of Ramadan (which began on 30 December 1997).

In the wake of the recent massacres, the US State Department has called for international investigations, and the European Union (EU) has proposed to send a EU ministerial delegation to Algeria to seek a solution to the crisis and to help the victims. Amnesty International continues to call for the establishment of an international investigation to ascertain the facts, examine allegations of responsibility and make recommendations in respect of the massacres and other abuses by all sides in Algeria. The need to investigate

and reveal the truth is the first step to finding solutions to this human rights tragedy.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send faxes/express/airmail letters:

- urging your government to support calls for an international investigation into the continuing killings in Algeria, stressing that it should not be regarded as an "internal affair" nor ignored on grounds of Algeria's national sovereignty;
- welcoming recent statements expressing support for international investigations or other measures intended to help the civilian population that your government may have made (if this applies to your government), but stressing that words have now to be turned into action and that an international investigation is a prerequisite to bring an end to the violence and human rights abuses.

APPEALS TO: Your government's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

COPIES TO: Your elected representatives at national level.
Local press and broadcast media.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 February 1998.