

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 28/04/97

EXTRA 45/97 "Disappearance" / Fear for safety / Legal concern

27 March 1997

**ALGERIA** Rachid Medjahed (alias Khaled Abou Mouaâd), ex-member of a town council representing the now banned *Front Islamique du Salut (FIS)*, Islamic Salvation Front

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Amnesty International has just learned with concern that Rachid Medjahed, whose arrest on 12 February 1997 was announced by the Algerian authorities on 23 February, is still in secret detention. His family was unaware of his arrest and has been unable to obtain any information as to his whereabouts. There are serious fears for his safety.

Rachid Medjahed was arrested during an "anti-terrorist" raid carried out by security forces in Algiers in which the ten or so other members of the group were killed. He appeared on Algerian television (ENTV) on 23 February 1997 in a programme broadcast after the eight o'clock news and confessed to having planned and directed the killing of Abdelhaq Benhamouda, leader of the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (UGTA)*, Algerian Workers' General Union, who was shot dead outside the UGTA's office in Algiers on 28 January 1997. He also gave the names of the members of his group who had reportedly been killed by security forces in an "anti-terrorist" raid. Among those killed in one of these raids was a group of eight people, including two women and two small children, killed on 12 February 1997 in an apartment opposite the UGTA's office in Algiers.

Rachid Medjahed's family had not been informed of his arrest and only learned about it when they saw him on television on 23 February when he appeared to be in a poor condition. Since that day his family and lawyers have been unable to obtain any information from the authorities concerning his place of detention. Algerian law limits incommunicado detention (the period when detainees are not allowed to communicate with their families and lawyers) to an absolute maximum of 12 days, and in addition the family of the detainee must be promptly informed of his arrest and place of detention. However, Rachid Medjahed has now been in secret detention for at least 45 days, and Amnesty International fears that he may be at risk of torture or of extrajudicial execution, given that such practices have become widespread in Algeria in the past few years. The organization is concerned that he may have been coerced into making his "confession" through torture or ill-treatment, and that the broadcasting of this "confession" may undermine his right to a fair trial.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Amnesty International recognizes the right and duty of the Algerian authorities to bring to justice members of opposition groups and any others who are responsible for killings and acts of violence. However, the organization is concerned that all individuals, regardless of the crimes they may have committed or of the accusations brought against them, must not be subjected to torture, ill-treatment or other human rights violations and that their trial must comply with internationally recognized standards for fair trial.

Over the past few years Amnesty International has documented widespread patterns and cases of serious human rights violations committed by Algerian security forces, including extrajudicial execution, torture and disappearance, as well as abuses committed by armed opposition groups, which define themselves as

"Islamic groups", including killings of civilians, rape and the issuing of death threats.

Since 1992, more than 60,000 Algerians have been killed. As violations and abuses by both government forces and armed opposition groups have continued to spread, an increasing number of civilians have found themselves caught in the spiral of violence.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, Arabic or English or your own language:**

- expressing deep concern at the "disappearance" of Rachid Medjahed and asking for information on his whereabouts and legal status;
- urging that he be allowed immediate and unconditional access to his lawyers and family, and to an independent medical examination and medical care if necessary;
- seeking assurances that he is not being tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for him to be tried promptly and in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Justice

M. Mohamed ADAMI  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
8 Place Bir Hakem  
El-Biar, Alger  
Algérie

**Fax: +213 2 922560, 925557, 796557, 722560**

**Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Alger, Algérie**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

Minister of Interior

M. Mustafa BENMANSOUR  
Ministre de l'Intérieur  
Ministère de l'Intérieur  
18 rue Docteur Saâdane  
Alger, Algérie

**Fax: + 213 2 736106**

**Telegrams: Ministre Intérieur, Alger, Algérie**

**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

M. Kamel REZZAG-BARA  
President  
Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)  
Palais du Peuple  
1 Av. Franklin Roosevelt  
Alger, Algérie

**Fax: +213 2 601042**

and to diplomatic representatives of Algeria accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 24 April 1997.