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ALGERIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES RELEASE OF THOUSANDS OF
DETAINEES

Amnesty International welcomes the recent release of over 600 detainees from a desert camp in Ain M'Guel, where they had been held without charge or trial since 1992.

"The release of these detainees is a positive step towards addressing one of our long-standing human rights concerns in the country," Amnesty International said today. "We hope that other concrete measures will be taken without delay to address other outstanding concerns."

These detainees were among more than 10,000 people arrested after the cancellation of the parliamentary elections at the beginning of 1992 and placed under administrative detention in desert camps in the south of Algeria. Most were subsequently released, but more than 600 remained detained without charge in conditions which constituted cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. Amnesty International opposed their detention and continued to call for their release.

The case of these detainees was one of the concerns raised by Amnesty International in a memorandum addressed to President Liamine Zeroual last August. The release, two weeks after the election of President Zeroual as President of the Republic, is an encouraging development.

"We want to see human rights at the top of the agenda in Algeria, so that all outstanding human rights concerns may be promptly addressed," Amnesty International said.

In its memorandum to President Zeroual, the organization had raised its concern at the increasingly widespread reports of extrajudicial executions and torture of detainees, and had urged that independent inquiries be set up to investigate human rights violations committed by the security forces.

Amnesty International is also concerned at the widespread killings of civilians and other serious abuses committed by armed groups which define themselves as "Islamic groups". The organization condemns such crimes and has repeatedly called on these armed groups to stop targeting civilians.

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