

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety/Intimidation

23 September 2005

ALGERIA

Mehria Brahimi (f) – mother of a “disappeared”
Zohra Elouaer (f) – mother of a “disappeared”
Nassera Hadji (f) – wife of a “disappeared”
Louiza Saker (f) – wife of a “disappeared”
Akila Saou (f) - mother of a “disappeared”
Aldjia Ziedi Chibane (f) - mother of a “disappeared”
and other relatives of the "disappeared"

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of families of the “disappeared” in Algeria, including those named above, following the forcible prevention by security forces of a peaceful demonstration in Constantine, eastern Algeria, on 22 September. It is also feared that forthcoming demonstrations by relatives of the “disappeared” on 28 and 29 September in different Algerian cities may be forcibly prevented by security forces, including through arrests, beatings and other forms of intimidation.

The attempts to intimidate and silence families of the “disappeared” come in the run-up to a referendum on 29 September on a Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. Families of the “disappeared” oppose the Charter, which denies that security forces and state-armed militias have been responsible for serious human rights violations, such as “disappearances”. Amnesty International also fears that measures may be introduced after the referendum which curtail the rights of both victims and human rights activists to publicize and campaign against “disappearances”.

On 22 September, families of the “disappeared” in Constantine were forcibly prevented from holding their weekly protest meeting outside the offices of the regional government authority. The square where demonstrations are held is close to a stadium where President Abdelaziz Bouteflika was due to deliver a speech at a rally promoting the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation on the same day.

Eye-witnesses have told Amnesty International that, when the first families arrived at the square at around 9am on 22 September, it was already surrounded by hundreds of plain-clothes and uniformed security officers. When around a dozen relatives of “disappeared” had gathered in the square, security officers forcibly took the six women named above to a police car. Louiza Saker, the wife of a “disappeared” and Secretary General of the Association of Families of the Disappeared in the province of Constantine, was among those arrested. She told Amnesty International that the security officers kicked and insulted the women, four of whom are in their late 60s, and beat them with their fists and with batons. Some of the older women were reportedly slapped in the face. Nassera Hadji, who is in her 30s and the wife of a “disappeared”, had her head scarf ripped off by a police officer as he arrested her.

Following the arrests, most families dispersed, fearing that they, too, might be beaten or arrested. Two of those who insisted on their right to protest were arrested around 10am and detained until the afternoon, including Rabah Benlatrèche, president of the Association of Families of the Disappeared in the province of Constantine.

The six women were taken to the central police station and detained there until around 4pm. They were reportedly questioned about their protest activities, as well as about the “disappearance” of their relatives. The women fear that they may face charges in connection to their protest activities.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Organizations of families of the “disappeared” are not legally recognized in Algeria and their weekly protests have taken place since 1998 without formal authorization. Even though the protests have generally been

allowed to happen, on a number of occasions the security forces have broken up demonstrations by force and beaten, ill-treated and/or arrested the relatives.

In recent weeks several organizations of families of the "disappeared" have reported an increase in intimidatory measures against them. Members of the Algiers-based organization SOS Disparus have reported receiving anonymous telephone threats in connection to their activities on behalf of the "disappeared" since early September. On 14 September, the father of a "disappeared" was arrested during a protest in Algiers where he had distributed statements that were critical of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation. He has been charged with illegally distributing tracts and is awaiting trial. On 17 September, the office of SOS Disparus in Oran, western Algeria, was reportedly searched by three police officers who did not show a search warrant.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, French, - English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of families of the "disappeared" in Algeria, including those named above, following the forcible prevention by security forces of a peaceful demonstration in Constantine, eastern Algeria, on 22 September;
- asking that forthcoming demonstrations by relatives of the "disappeared" on 28 and 29 September in different Algerian cities are not forcibly prevented by security forces;
- urging the authorities to guarantee the right of families of the "disappeared" and human rights defenders to peacefully express their views and defend the rights of victims of grave human rights abuses;
- seeking assurances that no measures will be introduced on the back of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation which criminalize the legitimate activities of human rights defenders, victims and their families, to speak out about and campaign against human rights violations committed by state agents.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency Abdelaziz Bouteflika
Présidence de la République
El Mouradia
Alger, Algérie

Fax: +213 21 609618 / 691595

E-mail: president@el-mouradia.dz

Salutation: Your Excellency

Interior Minister

M. Nouredine Yazid Zerhouni
Minister of the Interior
Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Collectivités Locales
Palais du Gouvernement
18 rue Docteur Saâdane
Alger, Algérie

Fax: + 213 21 605210 / 736106

Salutation: Dear Interior Minister

COPIES TO:

Official human rights body, reporting to president

Mustapha Farouk Ksentini
Commission nationale consultative de promotion et de protection des droits de l'Homme
Palais du Peuple, Avenue Franklin Roosevelt
Alger, Algérie

Fax: +213 21 239037 / 239005

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 4 November 2005.