

EXTERNAL

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ALGERIA

"Stop the massacres, stop the killings, stop all the atrocities in Algeria", Amnesty International issues this exceptional appeal to every supporter and every reader to act immediately and support the call for an independent international inquiry into the slaughters of recent months. After a brief decline during the recent local elections, the killings appear to have resumed on gruesome scale.

According to reports in the Algerian press, 27 people were massacred on 8 November 1997 in the mountain village of Lahmalit, 30 miles south of Algiers.

The gang of 30-50 attackers reportedly mutilated and burned their victims.

These included women and children aged between three to 12 years. The previous night, 23 villagers were reported killed in similar cut-throat killings in Tajmount, near Tlemcen, in north west Algeria. A series of bombs in Algiers and to the South in Medea and Blida also killed three people and injured over 30.

On 5 October, 16 children aged between 12 and 15 years and their driver were reportedly shot dead as they were travelling from their village to their school in Bouinan, near Blida. This followed an attack the previous week when 11 teachers, all women, were reportedly slaughtered in front of their pupils by an armed group outside a school in Sfizef.

On 2 October, killings were reported in Beni Slimane (Medea) with 32 victims, in Melaha (Blida) with 37 dead, in Harouba (Oran) with 14 dead and in Blida with up to 6 more dead; the following day, according to reports, 22 people were killed in El Khemis, Blida.

On 22 September, more than 200 people were killed in a widely reported massacre in Bentalha (Baraki), south of Algiers.

On 5 September more than 60 people were killed in Beni Messous on the western outskirts of Algiers.

On 28 August an estimated 300 people were killed in Sidi Rais.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In Algeria, political killings, "disappearances", torture, secret detentions, abductions and death threats have become routine. Thousands of men, women, children and elderly people have been slaughtered. Victims are hacked to death, decapitated, mutilated, shot and burned alive in their homes; pregnant women have been disembowelled, children and babies thrown over balconies. Up to 80,000 people have been killed in almost six years of conflict.

In many cases massacres, often lasting several hours, have occurred only a few kilometres or a few hundred metres from army and security forces barracks and outposts. Survivors have described how the army and security forces stood by while villagers were slaughtered.

The Algerian authorities blame the massacres and killings on "terrorist groups" but their security forces are also responsible for countless deaths. They reject calls for an international investigation on the grounds that it is "an interference in their internal affairs" but have failed to carry out an investigation or bring anyone to justice.

The Algerian authorities claim that the security situation is "under control", but this is the case only in areas dotted with oil and gas refineries and outlets. Foreign oil companies and their employees are indeed well protected. In other parts of the country, ordinary civilians are targeted with unspeakable brutality and all are at risk.

In a special appeal to the United Nations, Amnesty International is calling for an independent international investigation into the recent massacres and other human rights abuses. Its aim is to obtain facts, examine allegations of those responsible for carrying out human rights abuses, make recommendations concerning bringing the perpetrators to justice and ultimately put an end to the massacres. Mass public appeals for this will impress upon UN member states the strength of public feeling in wanting to end the indifference of international bodies to these outrages. It is this indifference and lack of action that makes this special appeal necessary.

Those few member states of the United Nations who have expressed concern at the situation have made mostly bland and generalized statements. The UN Commission on Human Rights has failed to address the plight of victims in Algeria. No UN expert "rapporteur" on human rights has visited the country during the previous six years of horror. The European Union has taken no action to instigate or support investigations, claiming it does not have full information. The Organisation of African Unity has failed to respond to the situation.

For further information see Amnesty report "Algeria: Civilian Population Caught in a Spiral of Violence", MDE 28/23/97, 18 November 1997 and information bulletin "Algeria: A Human Rights Crises", MDE 28/36/97.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in your own language.

- urging your government to support calls for an international investigation into the killings in Algeria, stressing that it should not be regarded as an "internal affair" nor ignored on grounds of Algeria's national sovereignty.

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 end of 1997.