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**Open letter  
to the presidential candidates in Algeria**

**CANDIDATES MUST PUT HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE TOP OF THEIR  
AGENDA**

In the run-up to the presidential elections of 15 April, Amnesty International is calling on the candidates to commit themselves to placing human rights at the top of their agenda.

In the last seven years, the civilian population in Algeria has been caught in a spiral of violence which has left tens of thousands of people dead or injured, made thousands orphans or refugees, and forced the civilian population to live in a permanent state of fear and insecurity.

Too often during the last few years, basic principles of human rights have been ignored and forgotten in the pursuit of policies which have failed to return peace and security to the Algerian people, who continue to die on a daily basis.

Respect for human rights helps to ensure - not undermine - security and stability. On the other hand, repression and impunity create and reinforce insecurity and instability.

Since the announcement in 1994 of the resumption of the electoral process, every election has been presented as a solution to the crisis. However, murders, summary executions, massacres, torture, "disappearances", rape and other atrocities have continued to increase, and during the 1995-97 election period, the violence reached its highest levels.

Systematic human rights violations committed in the name of "security objectives" have not restored peace and security; on the contrary they have led to further insecurity. Only a political system based on justice and respect for human rights can lead Algeria out of this spiral of violence.

Amnesty International is urging the presidential candidates to make a firm commitment to implementing a concrete program for the protection and promotion of human rights.

The organization urges the candidates to commit themselves in particular to:

- ensuring that independent and impartial investigations are carried out to shed light on past and present human rights violations and abuses, and that those responsible are brought to justice;
- taking concrete measures to end the impunity which continues to be enjoyed by members of the security forces, army and paramilitary militia groups, as well as by members of armed groups known as "Islamic groups", including those who have "repented";

- establishing a commission of inquiry to clarify the fate of all the “disappeared”, and taking the necessary measures to end the practice of secret detention;
- putting an end to the inequality of and discrimination against women found in national legislation, notably in the *Code de la Famille* (Family Code), and ensuring that national laws are brought into line with Article 29 of the Algerian Constitution and with international treaties ratified by Algeria;
- revising current legislation, including the *Code de la Presse* (Press Code) and the laws passed or amended between 1992 and 1997 by non-elected bodies, and with a view to repealing the laws which allow for the imprisonment of prisoners of conscience;
- taking the necessary steps to guarantee the independence of the judiciary;
- protecting human rights defenders and ensuring that they are able to carry out their work without fear for their safety;
- setting up mechanisms which ensure the accountability to civil society of all state structures, including the army and security services;
- taking measures to ensure that those imprisoned following unfair trials are retried in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

ENDS.../