

AI Index: MDE 28/012/2001

News Service 226/2001

Press Release from Amnesty International EU Office. Brussels, 18 December, 2001

## **EU-ALGERIA ACCORD**

### **HUMAN RIGHTS CLAUSE EFFECTIVELY DEAD**

As the European Commission and the President of Algeria Abdelaziz Bouteflika prepare to initial an EU-Algeria Association Agreement in Brussels tomorrow (Wednesday 19 December), Amnesty International says the fact this event is going ahead shows the EU's human rights clause is now clearly not worth the paper it is written on.

Amnesty International today releases a background briefing detailing the human rights abuses which continue in Algeria, including reports of killings, "disappearances", torture and secret detentions by the Algerian security forces, state-armed militias and armed groups. Tens of thousands of people have died and thousands have "disappeared" since the current conflict began in 1992.

"With Algeria taking part in the 'coalition against terrorism', the appalling human rights record in the country has clearly taken a back seat in EU-Algeria relations," said Dick Oosting, director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

"The time has come to state openly what most insiders already know, that the EU's standard human rights clause in its Association Agreements, is virtually defunct. Far from being an 'essential element', all it does is provide an 'alibi' for both parties, without imposing any real obligations," he said.

Significantly, the agreement (which is yet to be signed by the Council and ratified by the member states) also includes a chapter on cooperation on Justice and Home Affairs, which would include combating 'terrorism', but also prevention of illegal immigration and readmission. "This may raise serious questions for example about refugee protection", said Dick Oosting.

In its background report on human rights abuses in Algeria, Amnesty International says that although the level of violence and killings has fallen since 1999, it remains appallingly high. More than 80 unarmed civilians were shot dead by security forces during demonstrations this year, mostly in the Berber-dominated north-eastern region of Kabylia

An average of 200 people are killed in Algeria every month, in massacres, bomb attacks, armed confrontations and other attacks.

The report says torture (including torture of children as young as 15 years) by the security forces remains a widespread problem and cases of secret and unacknowledged detention continue to be reported. New legislative changes implemented in June 2001 threaten the right to freedom of expression. Impunity reigns, as no effective action is taken by the Algerian government to establish the truth about the abuses and prosecute those responsible, while UN human rights experts and NGOs continue to be denied access.

Amnesty International has written to External Relations Commissioner Patten and Commission President Prodi to express its concerns.

Amnesty International's background report is available on [www.amnesty-eu.org](http://www.amnesty-eu.org)

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