

# ALGERIA

## Who are the “disappeared”?

### Case-studies

Over the last few years, around 3,000 dossiers on the cases of people who have “disappeared” in Algeria since 1993 have been compiled by Amnesty International. These are people who were taken away from their homes, workplaces and elsewhere by members of the security forces, but of whose current whereabouts the authorities deny any knowledge.

Profiled below are a very small sample of these “disappearance” cases. There are victims from all walks of life and from many parts of the country: young and old, professionals and the unemployed, rich and poor, men and women, city-dwellers and people from rural areas.

Many of those who have “disappeared” were arrested in front of their families, neighbours or colleagues by security force members displaying no identification or warrant and then held in secret detention, in violation of Algerian and international human rights law. Many are thought to have been arrested because they were suspected of being involved in some way with an armed group. Some were merely denounced as such. In other cases, there is no discernible reason for the “disappearance”.

The families of those who have “disappeared” have been at the forefront of the struggle to obtain information about their whereabouts and fate, but have generally received little or no response from the authorities. Their persistent campaigning, supported by a few brave human rights lawyers within Algeria and international organizations outside the country, has, however, broken the taboo which had previously obscured the issue of “disappearances” inside the country.

This document accompanies the report *ALGERIA: “Disappearances”: the wall of silence begins to crumble* (AI Index: MDE 28/01/99), in which the phenomenon of “disappearances” in Algeria is examined in detail. Additional cases of “disappearance” are described in that report.

#### **Allaoua ZIOU**

Allaoua Ziou, a farmer in his late 20s, was arrested on 1 January 1995 in Héliopolis, a village in the *wilaya* (province) of Guelma, eastern Algeria. He was arrested by the gendarmerie and

has not been seen since. Four other people from the same village reportedly "disappeared" around the same time and under similar circumstances. Allaoua Ziou's family has sought information on his whereabouts and the reasons for his arrest with the authorities, including the gendarmerie in Héliopolis, but has to date received no reply.

Allaoua Ziou lived in Héliopolis, stockbreeder near his most of his time with the and returned to the dinner with his mother following day. On his house and the farm, he village to call in on his prayers.

was born in 1967 and where he worked as a family home. He spent animals he looked after family home only to eat and pick up lunch for the journeys between the would stop off in the friends and to perform

On the evening setting off to tend to his followed by several men reaching the farm, he witnesses being and bundled into a car as the *Cimetière des* (Martyrs' Cemetery). The witnesses reportedly followed the car until it reached a gendarmerie barracks. Since Allaoua was alone at the farm, his family only noticed that he had gone missing the following morning. He had never been arrested before.

of 1 January 1995, after animals, he was in plain clothes. Before was seen by several apprehended by the men near a cemetery known *martyres* (Martyrs'

His family has written to the President, the Ministers of Justice and the Interior, the State Prosecutor and to the *Observatoire national des droits de l'homme* (ONDH), National Human Rights Observatory, which reports to the President of the Republic, but has received no reply about Allaoua's whereabouts. In response to inquiries from human rights organizations, the ONDH claimed that Allaoua Ziou was a "terrorist" and had left to join the armed groups. When the family learned about this reply, they were less than convinced by it.

Why, for instance, had the ONDH not provided the family with this information when they had been persistently requesting news of Allaoua from the authorities for one and a half years?

Allaoua's brother, Mohamed Ziou, a medical doctor in Guelma, was arrested from his home on 27 September 1995, held in secret detention for 30 days, reportedly at the gendarmerie in Héliopolis, and then released without charge on 28 October 1995.

***Amine AMROUCHE***

Amine Amrouche, a 21-year-old unemployed apprentice carpenter, walked out of his home in Baraki, a district on the outskirts of the Algerian capital, Algiers, at about 3pm on 30 January 1997. Later in the afternoon, at approximately 4pm, he was spotted by friends in the neighbourhood. Since then he has not been seen. There were no eye-witnesses to see him being taken away, but he is believed to have “disappeared”. Several other youths are reported to have “disappeared” in Baraki during the same week.

Amine’s mother, Nassera Yous, who has dual French and Algerian nationality and lives in France, flew to Algeria in February 1997, but was unable to obtain any official information about him. She was told confidentially by people in the security forces that her son was in solitary confinement at the police station in Baraki. However, the police station denied any knowledge of Amine and his whereabouts. Amine’s grandmother, Fatima Yous, with whom he lived, went to the local gendarmerie to inquire about his whereabouts, but she was verbally abused and thrown out. The family also inquired with the local courts, hospitals and the morgue, but could not obtain any information.

It was suggested by a friend of Amine’s that he might have been taken for military service and on 30 March 1997, a conscript on leave came to the house. He said that he had seen Amine Amrouche at a barracks in Oran, where Amine had been injured by two bullets while trying to escape. The family went to Oran and checked all the hospitals and military barracks, but found nothing. In November 1997, Amine’s mother heard rumours that he was being detained in a military prison centre in Algiers.

Amine Amrouche had never been arrested before. Since Amine’s “disappearance”, his mother and grandmother have devoted themselves to finding out the truth about his fate and that of the thousands of other “disappeared” in Algeria. In 1998, Amine’s mother was dealt a further blow when her brother-in-law, Mohamed Cheridji, a 35-year-old foreman suffering from diabetes and heart trouble, was arrested on 25 January at his sister’s home in Baraki, Algiers, by plainclothes security force agents and subsequently “disappeared”. The same year, Nassera Yous formed an organization of parents whose children have “disappeared” in Algeria, through which she has been campaigning to bring attention to their plight. She told Amnesty International, “Amine’s ‘disappearance’ is an ongoing nightmare. All I want to know is what has happened to my son. Is that so much to ask?”

**Amina BENSLIMANE**

Amina Benslimane, a secretary in her late 20s was arrested by police on 13 December 1994 at 8.30am from her home in El-Harrach, a suburb of Algiers, in front of her mother. It is alleged that she was taken to the infamous Châteauneuf military security centre in Algiers and subsequently tortured. Amina's mother has written to the President, the Ministry of Justice and other authorities, but has heard nothing more about her daughter. Friends with contacts in prisons have told the mother that Amina was tortured to death, but these rumours are unsubstantiated.

Amina was born in 1966 and was single and working as a secretary in an engineer's office at the time of her "disappearance".

She had wanted to expose human rights violations in Algeria, and had taken photographs of bombings and house destruction by the security forces and was trying to get them published.

During the course of demonstrations held by families of the "disappeared" in central Algiers on 20 October 1997, Amina's mother was interviewed by a foreign journalist. The security forces intervened to disperse the demonstrators, arresting a lawyer and confiscating the tape recorder of the journalist. The tape recorder was returned to the journalist, but without the tape which contained the interviews with demonstrating family members of the "disappeared". The authorities promised to return the tape, but never did so.

**Aziz BOUABDELLAH**

Aziz Bouabdellah, a 22-year-old journalist, was arrested at his home in the Bouzareah district of Algiers during the night of 11/12 April 1997 in front of his mother and has not been seen since. He was taken in front of his family by three men who introduced themselves as members of the security forces. The authorities deny any knowledge of his arrest, but in the days following his arrest security force agents told a former colleague working for another newspaper that he was being detained in the Châteauneuf military security centre in Algiers, under suspicion of having links with an armed group. Aziz was previously arrested in January 1997, when he was interrogated and subsequently released without charge.

Aziz Bouabdellah was working as a journalist with the Arabic-language weekly newspaper *El-Alam Essiyassi* (The Political World) at the time of his “disappearance”. In October 1998 his mother told Amnesty International that she had heard rumours that he had died under torture in detention. The mother’s distress was compounded by the fact that the rumours came at a time when, had Aziz not “disappeared”, she would have been celebrating his 24th birthday with him.

### ***Mustapha BENKARA***

Mustapha Benkara, a medical doctor in his 40s, was arrested at the hospital where he was working in Medea, south of Algiers, on 31 March 1994. During the first 10 days following his arrest, his family was told unofficially that he was alive and well, but they stopped receiving news soon afterwards.

When his family asked after him at Medea Police Station, they were given conflicting information. They were told that he had been taken back to his place of birth for “investigation”, but when they inquired a month later at the same police station the police said that they had never heard of him. In July 1994, the family was reportedly informed by an official at the Ministry of Justice that Mustapha Benkara had been seen alive by someone in the military. The family also heard rumours in the two years after his “disappearance” that Mustapha had died in detention.

A human rights lawyer also received conflicting statements when he made inquiries about Mustapha Benkara. He was informed by the police that Mustapha had disappeared from their custody after being held in *garde à vue* (incommunicado) detention, only to be told by the gendarmerie that they were not aware of the case.

Mustapha Benkara was previously arrested at the beginning of 1993, allegedly because he was suspected of having been forced by an armed group to treat one of their injured members and of having failed to inform the security forces after the event. He was released from the gendarmerie a few hours later, after they had searched his home.

Mustapha Benkara was born in 1953 and is married with two children. He was the chief surgeon at Medea Hospital at the time of his “disappearance” and had been a candidate for the *Front de libération nationale* (FLN), National Liberation Front, in the 1991 legislative elections.

### **Fayçal BENLATRECHE**

Fayçal Benlatrèche, a student in his late teens, was arrested in the presence of his family at his home in Constantine, eastern Algeria, at 12.30am on 12 March 1995 by members of military security wearing combat dress and balaclavas. He has not been seen since. On the same night, five other young men were arrested in Constantine. Fayçal's family and the parents of the other children arrested that night have written to the Algerian authorities, but have to date received no reply. The arrest of Fayçal Benlatrèche has never been officially acknowledged by the authorities.

Fayçal, born in his "disappearance", baccalaureate which he 1995. He had been held for six days in the Constantine with his just 17 years old at the beaten while being held in subsequently released father was also questioned he cast in the 1991

1975, was, at the time of studying for his was due to take in June arrested before and was central prison of younger brother, who was time. Both of them were prison and were without charge. Their by the police on the vote legislative elections.

### **Abdelkrim and Benatia**

Abdelkrim Derouiche, a and shopkeeper, was taken western Algeria, on the 1996 and has not been grocery store, forms an Abdelkrim's colleagues in the shop, a relative and several neighbours saw men wearing plain clothes and balaclavas pull up in two vehicles and take him away. The witnesses managed to record the registration number of one of the two vehicles, but inquiries here yielded no results.

### **DEROUICHE**

31-year-old football coach from his shop in Relizane, evening of 22 August seen since. His shop, a integral part of his home.

The family suspects that the *garde communale* (communal guard) may be behind the arrest. On the morning of 22 August 1996, one of their members, who owed money to Abdelkrim, had threatened Abdelkrim with reprisals if he refused to provide him with free food from his shop.

Two days later, at 10.30pm on 24 August 1996, Abdelkrim's brother Benatia, then 33 years old, was arrested at his home in Relizane in front of his wife and two children by around 20 armed men in balaclavas after making inquiries regarding the reasons for Abdelkrim's arrest. Benatia had been a member of an armed group, but given himself up to the authorities in the context of the clemency (*rahma*) law of February 1995, which provides for charges to

be dropped or for reduced penalties for people involved in “terrorist” activities who give themselves up and repent. Following this, he had been detained for a few days and then released. There has been no news of Benatia since he was taken away on 24 August 1996.

***Omar DAHMANI***

Omar Dahmani, a 49-year-old businessman, was arrested at his home in Amirouche in the *wilaya* of Relizane on 8 April 1995 in front of his family and has not been seen since. Armed security force agents - some wearing combat gear and red berets, others dressed in green uniforms and two with black balaclavas over their heads - arrived in brown armoured vehicles of the sort used by military security. They did not present any identifying documents, but merely shouted “Police. Open up!” before taking Omar away. Requests for investigation into the case made with the state prosecutor in Relizane, the ONDH and the Minister of the Interior have yielded no results.

***M’hamed MOHAMMEDI***

M’hamed Mohammedi, a 63-year-old tradesman, was taken from his home in a village in the *wilaya* of Relizane on 5 October 1996 at 9.30pm by members of the local *garde communale*. Neighbours and passers-by who witnessed the operation saw M’hamed being taken away in a Renault 25 car belonging to the local *garde communale*.

His family learned that after being held for one night in Relizane, he was transferred to a military barracks in Kaïla, but has heard nothing more since.

***Mohamed Salah AIACHI***

Mohamed Salah Aiachi, a 59-year-old inspector in the *Trésor public* (Public Revenue Department) of Constantine, eastern Algeria, was arrested at his workplace on 28 June 1995 by four or five people who presented themselves as agents of the *Sûreté nationale* (Criminal Investigation Department). Similar agents had come to his workplace on several occasions previously and searched his office in his absence. He had reportedly been the target of an anonymous letter denouncing him as being a sympathizer of the *Front islamique du salut* (FIS), Islamic Salvation Front.

After making inquiries with the relevant authorities, the family received a reply from the ONDH affirming that Mohamed Salah had been kidnapped by an unidentified group. However, the security forces and authorities have not carried out any inquiries, such as taking statements from the family and witnesses of the abduction, as is usually the case for people abducted by armed groups. Moreover, the family had received news from a man who was taken around the same time as Mohamed Salah and later freed that he had seen and spoken with Mohamed Salah in a prison in the region of Constantine where they were both detained in September/October 1995.

**Salim BOUGHERARA**

Salim Bougherara, a 26-year-old trader in the import-export business, was on 5 April 1998 by security forces in his home in the Algiers. He has not been seen since. army check-point and the operation and in view of the army soldiers security force members who took army soldiers before and after the

arrested at 12.30am members of the military uniform from Bouroubaa district of

Salim's home is located next to an took place in front of Salim's family manning the check-point. The Salim away were seen talking to the arrest.

**Nacereddine BATACH**

Nacereddine Batach, a 37-year-old urban planner, married with five children, was arrested at his workplace - the *mairie* (town hall) at 2pm on 20 February 1994 by four been seen since. The policemen had and shown their official papers, but Nacereddine was absent at the time.

of Algiers - in front of his colleagues plainclothes policemen and has not arrived at the *mairie* earlier in the day were forced to return later as

**Ali LAKHDAR-CHAOUCH**

Ali Lakhdar-Chaouch, a 27-year-old 1 April 1997 at Kouba Hospital in taken at around 2am while he was on forces and has not been seen since.

orthopaedic surgeon, was arrested on Algiers where he worked. He was duty by members of the security

**Naima and Nadjoua BOUGHABA**

Naima and Nadjoua Boughaba, two sisters in their twenties, both working as clerks in the court of El-Harrach (a suburb of Algiers), were arrested together on their way to work in the morning of 12 April 1997. No news has been heard of them since.

**Kaddour AOUIMEUR**

Kaddour Aouimeur, a 34-year-old pilot with Air Algérie, was arrested by armed plainclothes policemen at his workplace - Houari Boumediène Airport in Algiers - on 15 April 1995. Some 20 days after the arrest, a person released from detention at the Châteauneuf military security centre came to tell Kaddour's family that Kaddour was being detained there, but there has been no more news since then.

**Mustapha BADRANI**



Mustapha Badrani, a 31-year-old jockey, was arrested outside his home in Bachdjarah, an eastern suburb of Algiers, on 3 November 1993 during a round-up by security forces in the area. He has not been seen since.

***Merouane BENBELKHAIR***

Merouane Benbelkhair, an unemployed 17-year-old, was arrested with his older brother at their home in Kouba, Algiers, at about 7pm on 3 January 1997 during a round-up by security forces. The brother was released from detention after eight days, but Merouane “disappeared”. A letter from the police has denied responsibility for the arrest.

***Lakhdar BENDADI***

Lakhdar Bendadi, a 49-year-old his 27-year-old son at his home in 1994 and taken to a local police released, but Lakhdar heard that he was being held in a

bakery worker, was arrested with Sig, western Algeria, on 10 August station. The son was soon “disappeared”. His family has secret military prison.

***Hamid TALEB***

Hamid Taleb, a 35-year-old shoe Greater Algiers, was arrested in October 1994. He was allegedly detained at Bab El-Zouar police station for 15 days, after which he “disappeared”.

factory worker in Bordj El-Kiffan, front of his colleagues on 11

***Boualem DJAITI***

Boualem Djaiti, a 37-year-old high school teacher, married with three children, was arrested at his home in Sidi Daoud, *wilaya* of Boumerdès, on 2 September 1995 by a set of combined security forces, including the military and the *garde communale*, and has since “disappeared”.

***Abdelmalek RACHEDI***

Abdelmalek Rachedi, a 28-year-old pastry chef, was arrested with two cousins by combined security forces at a roadblock in Sétif, eastern Algeria, at about 7pm on 19 April 1996. The car he was driving at the time was confiscated. The two cousins were released later, but Abdelmalek Rachedi has not been seen since. A young man who was detained with him and subsequently released informed the family that he had met Abdelmalek in detention and brought the family Abdelmalek’s shoes.

***Taieb SAI***

Taieb Sai, a taxi driver born in 1959, was arrested at around 2am on 7 December 1996 at his home in Gué de Constantine, a suburb of Algiers. The family heard that he was being held in various detention centres, but nothing more than this.

***Samir GUERRAB***

Samir Guerrab, a 24-year-old engineering student, was arrested by local security forces at around 4.30am on 8 November 1994 at his home in Boufatis in the *wilaya* of Oran, western Algeria. He was taken in his pyjamas to the local gendarmerie, then transferred to nearby Dar El-Beida, where he was held for eight days. Afterwards, he was transferred again and there has been no news of him since.

***Djameleddine FAHASSI***

Djameleddine Fahassi, a 41-year-old journalist, "disappeared" on 6 May 1995 after being arrested outside a café in the Algiers suburb of El-Harrach.

***Yacine BOULASBAA***

Yacine Boulasbaa, a 24-year-old paramedical officer working in an Algiers hospital, was arrested at his home at about 1am on 25 December 1995 by members of the security forces. He has not been seen since.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION**

If you would like to take action to help clarify the fate of the "disappeared" in Algeria, please send letters in French, Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the "disappearance" of one, some or all of the people featured in this document;
- urging the authorities to release the person or people immediately, unless they are to be charged with recognizably criminal offences in which case they should be detained in a recognized place of detention and promptly brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

M. Abdelmalek SELLAL  
Ministre de l'Intérieur  
Ministère de l'Intérieur  
18 rue Docteur Saâdane  
Alger, Algeria

*Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister*

M. Ghouti MEKAMCHA  
Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice  
8 Place Bir Hakem, El-Biar  
Alger, Algeria

*Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister*

**COPIES TO:**

M. Kamel REZZAG-BARA  
President, Observatoire national des droits de l’homme (ONDH)  
Palais du Peuple, 1 Av. Franklin Roosevelt  
Alger, Algeria

and to diplomatic representatives of Algeria accredited to your country.

<p><b>KEYWORDS:</b> DISAPPEARANCES / INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION / PHOTOGRAPHS / CIVIL DEFENCE / FARMERS / CLERICAL WORKERS / JOURNALISTS / DOCTORS / STUDENTS</p>
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