

EXTRA 25/00 Mothers and other relatives of the "disappeared" arrested and

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ALGERIA Families of the "disappeared"

On 15 March 2000, around 40 relatives of the "disappeared" in Algeria were arrested by security forces on their way to a planned demonstration in Relizane, Western Algeria. Although they were released after a few hours they were interrogated and warned that if they demonstrated again they would be imprisoned. As the relatives of the "disappeared" of Relizane plan to demonstrate every Wednesday, Amnesty International is concerned for their safety.

About 30 women, two of them pregnant, and 10 men were arrested as they made their way to the demonstration of relatives of the "disappeared", due to start at 9 am in the *Place de la Résistance*, a public square. All those arrested had photographs of their missing loved ones with them and cards identifying them as belonging to a local committee of families of the "disappeared".

About 100 other relatives of the "disappeared" were dispersed by the security forces who had cordoned off the square and taken up positions on routes being used by the demonstrators to reach the square. Security forces were reportedly very intimidating and insulting to many of the demonstrators. They had anticipated the demonstration following an initial one held on Wednesday 8 March, International Women's Day, after which the ongoing campaign of demonstrations had been planned.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 1993, around 4,000 men and women have "disappeared" in Algeria after being arrested. Their families have been searching for information on their whereabouts ever since. They have gone to police stations, army barracks, prisons, morgues and cemeteries, petitioned the judicial authorities and appealed to the government, the parliament and the President of the Republic. Despite government promises in 1998 to carry out investigations into "disappearances", no concrete action has yet been taken.

For years most families of the "disappeared" have been too afraid to protest publicly. Since August 1998, however, hundreds of relatives, especially mothers, began to regularly hold demonstrations in the capital, Algiers, and other cities demanding news of their missing loved ones. On some occasions, notably in December 1998 and January and March 1999, the security forces violently broken up demonstrations in Algiers, ill-treating several women.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- expressing concern that about 40 people, including 30 women, were arrested on 15 March 2000 as they made their way to a peaceful demonstration in Relizane and were threatened with imprisonment if they demonstrated again;
- urging the authorities to ensure that the security forces do not arrest, ill-treat or threaten the families of the "disappeared" for peacefully demonstrating;
- urging the authorities to investigate all cases of "disappearance" and clarify their fate;
- reminding the authorities of their commitment to the 10-year UN Beijing Platform for Action drawn up in 1995 during the UN Fourth World Conference

on women which states, among others, that "Women engaged in the defence of human rights must be protected....".

APPEALS TO:

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Algérie

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Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre / Your excellency

M. Ahmed OUYAHIA
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
8 Place Bir Hakem
El Biar
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Algérie

Telegrams:Ministre Justice, Alger, Algérie

Faxes: + 213 2 92 21 95

Salutation:Monsieur le Ministre / Your excellency

COPIES TO:

M. Kamel REZZAG-BARA
President
Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme (ONDH)
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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 15 April 2000.