

AI INDEX: MDE 28/30/98

31 JULY 1998

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Algeria: UN Human Rights Committee blasts human rights record

Amnesty International shares the grave concerns about the human rights situation in Algeria, expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee in their conclusions announced today, and welcomes the Committee's recommendations.

"For the first time a UN mechanism, in expressing its concern about the serious human rights crisis, has issued concrete recommendations to the Algerian Government for measures it should take to stop and prevent grave violations," Amnesty International said.

"If these recommendations are implemented this could certainly help to address the very grave human rights crisis in Algeria."

During the two-day examination of the Government's report last week, the Committee repeatedly expressed concern about the serious human rights crisis in Algeria and about violations by government forces, including "disappearances", secret detention, torture and extrajudicial executions, and about the existence and role of militias armed by the state.

The Committee stated that: "Widespread and indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population, involving the loss of innumerable lives, and a general climate of violence heighten the responsibility of the State party to re-establish and maintain the conditions necessary for the enjoyment and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms in Algeria."

In its conclusions the Committee called on the Algerian authorities to take effective measures to:

- prevent massacres and attacks against the civilian population and, if they nevertheless occur, to come promptly to the defence of the population;
- to ensure that proper investigations are conducted by an independent body to determine who the offenders are and to bring them to justice, and in all cases of massacres to conduct an independent inquiry into the conduct of the security forces, from the lowest to the highest levels;
- that all allegations of torture be investigated by an impartial body, that the result of the investigations be published and that officials involved in torture be prosecuted and, if convicted severely punished;
- to record all reported cases of disappearances and day to day action to retrace the disappeared and to assist the families concerned to retrace the disappeared;
- to ensure that nobody be arrested or detained outside the law and that complaints about such arrest or detention be given immediate attention;

With regard to the militias armed by the state, the Committee expressed serious concern about the legitimacy of the transfer of such power by the State to private groups, in light of the very real risk to human life and of the risk of unsanctioned abuses, and urged the State to maintain within its police and defence forces the responsibility of maintaining law and order.

The Committee repeatedly reiterated its concern at the lack of concrete information both in Algeria's 55-page report and in the oral comments by the delegation. The deliberate failure by the Algerian authorities to provide concrete and relevant information on patterns and cases of human rights violations in the country was yet another example of its contempt for its international obligations in the field of human rights protection.

The Human Rights Committee's conclusions reflect the gravity of the human rights situation in the country.

"However, in light of the complete failure by the Algerian Government to admit to the violations and to offer any guarantees that they will be redressed, the Committee should request an additional report on specific and most pressing concerns such as "disappearances", torture and extrajudicial executions to be examined at the next session of the Committee, in order to ensure implementation of its recommendation to the Algerian Government," Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International urges the Algerian Government to take concrete measures to implement the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee without delay.

Background

Algeria's report to the UN Human Rights Committee was submitted with a delay of more than two years; Algeria had last submitted its report to the Committee in 1991 and had last been examined by the Committee in March 1992. Its report was due to be submitted in 1995 but was submitted earlier this year.

The UN Human Rights Committee is a body of 18 experts elected by the States Parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to monitor the way these states implement their obligations set out in the Covenant. Algeria ratified the Covenant in 1989. State parties to the ICCPR are requested to submit periodical reports to the Committee every four years. The Committee members act in their personal capacity and do not represent their government. The Human Rights Committee regularly reviews written reports from states on how the Covenant has been implemented by questioning government representatives and issuing written conclusions. During the present session held in Geneva the reports of Algeria, Israel, Italy, Macedonia and Tanzania were examined.

...ENDS/