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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN ALGERIA

ISSUE

Algeria is experiencing a turbulent period marked by increasing violence, discontinuation of the democratic process, and deteriorating human rights and economic conditions.

BACKGROUND

After having initiated a process of economic and political liberalization, Algeria is now experiencing internal difficulties at the political, economic and security levels; these have worsened over the past two years. The state of emergency proclaimed in February 1992 has been extended indefinitely as a result of the Islamic terrorist campaign. These difficulties began with the annulment of the legislative elections in January 1992. The escalating violence, attributed mainly to illegal Islamic groups, has claimed about 2,000 victims. Confrontation between the authorities and armed Islamic groups has dominated the domestic scene and pushed prospects of renewing the democratic process further into the background. Negotiations have been started between the authorities and the political parties, with the exception of the now outlawed Islamic party, in an attempt to reach a political consensus and defuse the crisis.

With violence escalating, an anti-terrorist law was introduced in 1992 establishing a legal framework for the fight against terrorism. It outlined the conditions under which presumed terrorists might be arrested and detained, and instituted special tribunals. Application of the anti-terrorist law has been criticized for resulting in human rights abuses, including mistreatment, torture and hasty judicial procedures. Realizing that excesses have occurred, the authorities have pledged to correct them, mainly through the Observatoire National des Droits de l'Homme, an official human rights monitoring agency.

The deteriorating human rights picture has been reflected in the increasing number of politically-motivated murders. Several members of the press, intelligentsia, judiciary and political ranks have been the target of terrorist attacks.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has encouraged Algeria to introduce political and economic reforms in the interest of liberalism and democracy. We are aware of the difficulties facing Algeria in this area. Canada is concerned about the increase of violence and terrorism, and about the resultant deterioration of human rights. It has conveyed its concerns to the Algerian authorities.

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