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ALGERIA

ISSUE

In the face of recurring violence, Algeria's human rights record has been the target of continued criticism over the past decade.

BACKGROUND

In recent months, the international community has paid less attention to the situation in Algeria. This might be attributable to the reduced scale of the massacres being perpetrated against Algeria's most vulnerable population. Despite the relative lull in media coverage, however, violence continues to be a daily reality in Algeria. Criticism continues to be directed against the country's human rights violations, namely summary executions, torture, arbitrary arrest, etc. **Armed Islamic groups** are said to be the main perpetrators in terms of human rights violations, but the government has also been criticized in this regard. Only the Front des Forces Socialistes continues to call for an International Commission of Enquiry into the situation in Algeria.

The fate of **Algeria's disappeared** is one of the most discussed human rights issues. Public demonstrations where the demonstrators (mostly women) seek to learn what has happened to the members of their families represent a new reality in Algeria. Centres have been set up to receive citizen complaints in this regard.

Women and children continue to be favourite targets of the violence. Amendments brought by the government to the Family Code have failed to win over Algeria's women and Islamists. The country's overburdened schools are unable to provide students with a complete education, despite the fact that school is free in Algeria. Increased demand is placing a strain on the public health care system. A shortage of housing remains at the heart of the country's social problems, along with unemployment (upwards of 30%), illiteracy and the growing impoverishment of the population. Strengthened rules to promote the Arabic language have aggravated cultural tensions, especially in Kabylie, the scene of public unrest in the aftermath of the assassination of Kabyle singer Mahtoub Lounes. While the rights of persons with disabilities are recognized, it is often left to the family to assume responsibility for their care. Homosexual rights are not recognized.

The Algerian government submitted (albeit belatedly) its human rights report to the **Committee on Human Rights**. The Committee's comments on the report were criticized in Alger. The government received several foreign delegations, including one from Canada, and notably the one from the United Nations delegation led by the former President of Portugal, Mario Soares. The UN's special rapporteurs do not have access to Algeria.

The coming months will see the election of a new **President of the Republic**. Despite significant progress in getting democratic political institutions up and running, the opposition parties have denounced various irregularities during the most recent municipal/regional elections.

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