

tures to provide for the conditions in which all media are able to play their role in providing accurate, reliable and pluralistic information.

Religious intolerance, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/6, paras. 17, 19, 94)

The report notes that the government responded to the Special Rapporteur's request for information on laws related to religious freedoms by providing a copy of the Constitution and the Act establishing public holidays, including religious holidays. The report notes, however, that the government had not responded to cases that were previously transmitted. No details of those cases were provided.

Torture, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/38, paras. 12–18; E/CN.4/1998/38/ Add.1, paras. 4–8)

The report refers to information received indicating that torture and ill-treatment occurred frequently during periods of incommunicado detention in police and gendarmerie stations, military security centres and secret detention centres; since the issuance of decree No. 92-03 in September 1992, incommunicado or garde à vue detention could reportedly be extended to 12 days; the main purpose of torture and ill-treatment was said to be the extraction of information and the signing of confessions in the form of written statements (procès verbaux) during interrogation; torture and ill treatment were also used as a form of punishment; persons suspected of having links with armed opposition groups were particularly vulnerable to torture; torture methods most commonly used by the security forces were said to include: "chiffon" — tying a detainee to a bench, stuffing a cloth in the mouth and pouring large quantities of dirty water and chemicals into the mouth; "chalumeau" — the use of a torch to inflict burns on the body; electric shocks to sensitive parts of the body; tying a rope around the penis and/or testicles or placing the genitals between drawers; beatings; burnings by cigarettes; insertion of objects or glue into the anus; and suspension. Other methods include rape; the pumping of salt water into the stomach — sometimes reportedly leading to death; and boring holes in limbs or breaking them. Detainees were reportedly often blindfolded during prison transfers and sometimes also during interrogation and the initial period of detention. Information also indicated that independent medical supervision during incommunicado detention, and thereafter, had frequently been denied and, if a medical examination took place, it was often carried out after a delay and by a government-appointed doctor. Since 1992, the authorities had reportedly not carried out any official judicial investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment and preventive measures had allegedly not been taken. Confessions obtained under duress were said to have been used as evidence in court. No independent human rights or humanitarian organization was reportedly able to carry out private interviews with detainees in prison.

The Special Rapporteur expressed the hope that the government would extend him an invitation for a visit.

The four individual cases transmitted to the government related to: the abduction and detention of a human rights lawyer and the fact that no investigation seems to have been carried out into allegations of ill treatment; arrest of two individuals on suspicion of having links with an armed opposition group, followed by torture, including use of electric shocks and the "chiffon" and the failure of the authorities to respond to a request for a medical examination by their lawyer; arrest and detention followed by torture which is said to have resulted in near total deafness and the near-loss of an eye; and arrest of a journalist by members of the security forces who was denied any contacts with his family or lawyer. On the last case, the government replied that the journalist had never been arrested.

Violence against women, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/54, Section I.A)

The report notes that women are often the victims of violence perpetrated by non-state actors during armed conflict. It also refers to forced marriages by non-state actors in Algeria. The report recalls that, in March 1994, a faction called the Armed Islamic Group issued a statement classifying all unveiled women who appear in public as potential military targets. To punctuate this threat, gunmen on a motorbike shot and killed two unveiled high school female students who were standing at a bus station. The Special Rapporteur (SR) stated that the Algerian civil war is perhaps the most violent conflict in the world today and noted that, although both men and women are targets, and both sides are guilty of human rights violations, the armed Islamic opposition reserve particularly harsh treatment for women who do not conform to their strict dictates, including unveiled women, professional women, and independent, single women living alone. They also engage in forced marriages and other forms of abduction of women living in areas under their control. The report asserts that as non-state actors during armed conflict, they are nonetheless governed by humanitarian law.

Mechanisms and Reports of the Sub-Commission

Systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1998/13, para. 67)

The report refers to information received related to the sexual violence in the ongoing hostilities in Algeria and reports suggesting that armed groups have abducted women and girls for forced, temporary "marriages". In these marriages the captive women and girls are raped, sexually abused, and often mutilated and killed.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Initiative of the Secretary-General

In June 1998, at the invitation of the government, the Secretary-General (SG) established a panel of eminent persons to visit Algeria, gather information on the