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Head of state: **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**

Head of government: **Abdelmalek Sellal (replaced Ahmed Ouyahia in September)**

The authorities continued to restrict freedoms of expression, association and assembly, dispersing demonstrations and harassing human rights defenders. Women faced discrimination in law and practice. Perpetrators of gross human rights abuses during the 1990s, and torture and other ill-treatment against detainees in subsequent years, continued to benefit from impunity. Armed groups carried out lethal attacks. At least 153 death sentences were reported; there were no executions.

Background

The year saw protests and demonstrations by trade unionists and others against unemployment, poverty and corruption. These were dispersed by the security forces, which also thwarted planned demonstrations by blocking access or arresting protesters.

Algeria's human rights record was assessed under the UN Universal Periodic Review in May. The government failed to address recommendations to abolish laws originating under the state of emergency, in force from 1992 until 2011, to ease restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and to recognize the right to truth of families of victims of enforced disappearances during the 1990s.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Algeria in September, and discussed with the authorities a long-requested visit by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

Freedoms of expression and association

New laws on information and associations adopted in December 2011 restricted media reporting of issues relevant to state security, national sovereignty and Algeria's economic interests, and

tightened controls on NGOs, empowering the authorities to suspend or dissolve them and deny them registration or funding. Journalists faced prosecution for defamation under the Penal Code.

- Manseur Si Mohamed, a journalist at La Nouvelle République newspaper in Mascara, was fined and sentenced to two months' imprisonment in June for making "defamatory comments" in reporting that a state official had failed to implement a judicial decision. He remained at liberty pending an appeal.
- In October, the authorities rejected an application for registration from the National Association for the fight against corruption (ANLC), giving no specific reasons.

Freedom of assembly

Despite lifting the state of emergency in 2011, the authorities continued to prohibit demonstrations in Algiers under a 2001 decree. There and elsewhere, security forces either prevented demonstrations by blocking access and making arrests or dispersed them through actual or threatened force.

- On 24 April, security forces were reported to have beaten up and arrested judicial clerks engaged in a sit-in protest over their working conditions.

Human rights defenders

The authorities continued to harass human rights defenders, including through the courts.

- Abdelkader Kherba, a member of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH) and the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC), was fined and received a suspended prison sentence of one year in May after a court convicted him of "direct incitement to a gathering" for joining and filming a sit-in protest by judicial clerks. He was held in custody from 19 April to 3 May. He was again arrested, detained and prosecuted after attempting to film a demonstration against water cuts at Ksar El Boukhari, Médéa, in August. Charged with insulting and committing violence against an official, he was acquitted and released on 11 September.
- Yacine Zaïd, a trade union activist and president of the LADDH's Laghouat branch, was arrested and beaten by police in October. He received a suspended six-month prison term and was fined for "violence against a state agent". The court ignored his allegation of assault by police despite medical evidence.
- Yacine Zaïd and three other human rights defenders who participated in a sit-in outside the court trying Abdelkader Kherba in April were charged with "inciting a non-armed gathering", which carries a punishment of up to one year's imprisonment. On 25 September, the court declared it was unable to try them; however, the charges were still pending at the end of the year.

Counter-terrorism and security

Armed groups, including Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), carried out bombing and other attacks, mostly against military targets. The authorities reported killings of members of armed groups by the security forces but disclosed few details, prompting fears that some may have been extrajudicially executed. At least four civilians were reportedly killed by bombs or security forces' gunfire. The Department of Information and Security (DRS) retained wide powers of arrest and detention, including incommunicado detention of terrorism suspects, facilitating torture and other ill-treatment.

- Abdelhakim Chenoui and Malik Medjnoun, who were jailed for 12 years in 2011 for the murder of Kabyle singer Lounès Matoub, were released in March and May 2012 respectively. Both had been detained continuously from 1999 until their trial in 2011. Abdelhakim Chenoui said he was forced to "confess" under duress and Malik Medjnoun alleged that he was tortured in police detention in 1999.

Impunity for past abuses

The authorities took no steps to investigate thousands of enforced disappearances and other human rights abuses committed during the internal conflict of the 1990s. The Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation (Law 06-01), in force since 2006, gave immunity to the security forces and criminalized public criticism of their conduct. Families of those forcibly disappeared were required to accept death certificates in order to receive compensation but were denied information about the fate of their disappeared relatives. Those who continued to call for truth and justice faced harassment.

- Mohamed Smaïn, former head of the LADDH in Relizane and an advocate of truth and justice for the families of the disappeared, was arrested in June when he failed to respond to a summons from the Relizane prosecutor. The summons was in connection with a two-month prison sentence and fines imposed on him after he criticized the authorities for moving corpses from a mass grave in Relizane in 2001. His sentence had been confirmed by the Supreme Court in 2011. He was released under a presidential pardon issued in July on health grounds.

Women's rights

Women continued to face discrimination in law and practice. However, following legislation in 2011 to increase women's representation in parliament, women won almost a third of the seats in national elections in May.

In March, the CEDAW Committee urged the government to reform the Family Code to give women equal rights with men in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance. The Committee also urged the government to withdraw Algeria's reservations to CEDAW, ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, enact laws to protect women against domestic and other violence, and address gender inequality in education and employment.

Death penalty

The courts handed down at least 153 death sentences, mostly to defendants who were sentenced in their absence after they were convicted on terrorism charges. There were no executions; the authorities maintained a de facto moratorium on executions in place since 1993.

- Eight men were sentenced to death on 25 October after they were convicted of kidnapping and murder. At least two of the defendants alleged they had been tortured in pre-trial detention in 2011.

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