

TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR DISAPPEARED IN ALGERIA

NEWSLETTER

Visit of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to Algiers, 17 to 20 September 2012

A High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Algeria for the first time since the country became a member of the United Nations Organisation. During four days of meetings with different members of the Algerian government, [Navi Pillay drew up a critical assessment of the human rights situation, and of the treatment of the personal files of disappeared persons](#). She recommended that various special UNO rapporteurs should visit, including that of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID). However, in spite of the goodwill shown by the Algerian government, the WGEID had, several days later, to refuse the invitation because of the conditions imposed on it. A visit of the working group is still being negotiated; the CFDA continues to press that it refuses any restriction imposed by the Algerian government.

Mme Pillay echoed concerns already expressed by the CFDA and associations for the defence of human rights about the legal and administrative constraints to which civil society organisations are subjected. She has, moreover, denounced the pressure exercised upon human rights defenders and trade unions; she has quite clearly called upon the Algerian government 'to revise its laws and practices regarding civil society organisations and the freedom to meet'.

It must be said, however, that the timing allowed for civil society and associations to meet Mme Pillay's during her visit was quite insufficient; a special meeting of the High Commissioner with families of the disappeared was cancelled on the day that it should have taken place. As a result the CFDA organised a demonstration in front of the CNCPDPH (National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights) office on 19 September to bring the plight of the disappeared to the attention of the High Commissioner. [The security forces cracked down violently on the gathering](#) and tried to prevent demonstrators getting close to the High Commissioner. She, however, was briefly able to reassure families of her support for them.

Communications training

Continuing its bi-annual training courses in communications, the CFDA organised a training course on 24 and 25 August entitled 'Communication tools and conflict management'. Some 30 lawyers, human rights defenders and students were present. The trainer was a psychologist who introduced the participants to constructive communication and positive management of conflicts.

The objective of the first day was to make participants conscious of how to manage a group in the face of conflict and of the different possible positions that can be taken. During the second day participants worked on non-violent communication techniques. The training ended with an analysis of the approach which had been proposed during the two days. Participants evaluated the lessons they had learned and expressed their expectations. They particularly declared their wish to have more such sessions which allow them to learn in a group and better determine their competences and limits.

Victims of forced disappearance: 29th international day

Thanks to the perseverance of families of the disappeared and particularly FEDEFAM (Latin-American Federation of Associations for Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared), 30 August has been designated, since 1983, as the International Day for Disappeared Persons. As every year, and in order to commemorate this day, CFDA and SOS Disparus called for a demonstration in memory of disappeared people in the Place 1er Mai in Algiers. Various national and international organisations as well as political parties responded. Those who joined the families of the disappeared included RAJ, LADDH, MJIC, RDLD, CLA Amnesty International, the associations Tharwa Fadhma n'Soumer, and deputies from the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS).

The demonstration, at the time that the CNCPDPH was getting ready to publish its annual report on the human rights situation in Algeria, was the occasion for the CFDA and SOS Disparus to repeat their concerns concerning the search for justice and truth, to denounce the Charter and its relevant clauses and to call on the government to ratify the Convention against Enforced Disappearances. The action was also designed to increase public awareness of disappearances.

The security forces encircled the Place 1er mai so that the demonstration could not take place; demonstrators were pushed towards narrow streets but families once more proved their determination and the gathering took place several metres from the esplanade, controlled by police. The demonstration was covered by a large part of the press who wrote of the CFDA demands and the mothers' stories.

In Paris, the CFDA [celebrated](#) the day in Place de Ménilmontant, in collaboration with the Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Forced Disappearances (FEMED). Photos and documentaries on enforced disappearances were displayed in marquees erected in the square; tea and Algerian cakes were made available. Speeches by the President of Amnesty International France and the human rights ambassador in France enlivened debates. During the whole day activists, passers-by, and relations of disappeared people from other countries, stopped to ask questions about disappearances and how they could support the actions being undertaken by CFDA and FEMED. A [petition](#) to ask that a place or a street in Paris be named in homage to all the victims of enforced disappearance received many signatures.

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of independence spoiled

5 July 2012 was the 50th anniversary of Algerian independence. While the government celebrated the event with sumptuous celebrations, the demonstration which was organised by CFDA, SOS Disparus and the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC) was violently suppressed. The organisations were calling for a peaceful demonstration on the Place 1er mai to remind the Algerian government of its responsibility in human rights violations and of its refusal to establish truth and justice in respect of victims of enforced disappearance. The demonstration was, however, dispersed by the police after several minutes.

The security forces used totally disproportionate violence faced by the demonstrators. Several demonstrators were hit and even aged relatives of disappeared persons physically mistreated. Some 50 members of the CNDDC, as well as Hacène Ferhati, Slimane Hamitouche, Youcef Kyzra et M'Barek Hamdane, all relatives of disappeared persons, were interrogated; they were released several hours later. The violence used by the police was the subject of numerous articles in the press. The CFDA immediately published a [press release](#) and sent [demands to intervene](#) to the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances; messages were also sent to the UNO expressing indignation and concern about the regular violations of human rights committed by the Algerian state when it meets demonstrators.

Meeting with Algerian civil society 22 - 23 September 2012

The Coalition of associations of victims of the 90s launched a campaign of political and media support and the Coalition's action, to assure it of political and media support and to present its alternative Charter for Truth, Peace and Justice. At the first of these meetings representatives of the associations of victims composing the Coalition, accompanied by Madjid Benchikh, emeritus professor of law, went to meet Mohamed Said, President of the Justice and Freedom party, Noureddine Benissad, President of the LADDH, Ahmed Benbitour an ex-Prime minister, Chérif Reski director of the newspaper El Khabar, Ali Laskri National Secretary of the FFS, and Nadia Ait Zaï, President of the CIDDEF. All of them expressed their solidarity with the families of disappeared persons and with victims of terrorism. The National Secretary of the FFS announced the intention of the party to organise a parliamentary day for victims, in liaison with the associations involved.

In the course of these talks Coalition association members took up the question of violation of freedom of association and demonstration, and the absence of any investigation into cases of enforced disappearance. Other meetings will be organised in order to allow common action to be taken by civil society: the government is looking to weaken civil society action by shackling freedom of expression, association and demonstrations.

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Geneviève Garrigos, Rachid Malaoui et François Zimeray at the gathering on the 30th of August in Paris



Participants at the communications training



Gathering for the 50th commemoration of the independence

IN BRIEF

Trial of four activists

Abdou Bendjoudi, Othmane Aouameur, Yacine Zaid and Lakhdar Bouzini appeared before Bab El Oued court on 25 September. These four human rights activists are being hounded for 'inciting unarmed gatherings' (Article 100 of the Penal Code). They are charged with having participated in a peaceful sit-in in front of Sidi M'Hamed court on 26 April 2012 to denounce the judicial harassment of which Abdelkader Kherba was a victim; they risk up to a year's imprisonment and a fine of 5 000 Algerian Dinars. At the hearing on 25 September the affair was passed to the public prosecutor. The case has still not been closed. A number of members of SOS Disparus were present at the hearing..

Abdelkader Kherba released

While he was on hunger strike to protest against being condemned to a year's imprisonment and a fine of 20 000 Algerian Dinars for 'insulting and violence towards a government official', Abdelkader Kherba was discharged on 11 September by the court at Ksar el Boukhari. CFDA, together with the EuroMediterranean Human Rights Network, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights and SNAPAP, released a [communiqué](#) welcoming the court's decision; at the same time it condemned the continual harassment of human rights defenders. Even though Abdelkader Kherba was released for this matter he is still waiting for a verdict concerning his arrest for 'inciting a gathering' and for having 'exceeded his authority' for having participated on 18 April at the court clerks' demonstration in front of Sidi M'Hamed court. He had already been condemned to a year's suspended imprisonment and to a fine of 20000 dinars. After these successive delays the trial should take place in November.

The CNCPDPH submits its annual report to the UNO

On 24 August the CNCPDPH (National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights) handed over its annual report on the human rights situation in Algeria. The Commission invites the Algerian government to establish a dialogue with families of the disappeared and to provide them with 'all necessary explanations' in order to respond to their questions. The CFDA published a [communiqué](#) on 29 August in which it welcomes the progress appearing in the disappeared files; it is sceptical, however, as to the real willingness of the government to establish a dialogue with the relatives of the disappeared. The CFDA reckons that the government must, as a first priority, conform its politics to the requirements of the international clauses for the protection of human rights, which it itself ratified; it must also follow the recommendations of the UN committees. The families of disappeared are also waiting for the Algerian government to express these indications of good intentions in concrete action, particularly the exhumation of bodies buried under an X sign, without waiting for that before the opening of a dialogue.

A delegation from the American embassy visits the SOS Disparus office

The new head of the political and economic section at the US embassy, Mme Sahar Khoury-Kincannon, on taking up her post at the embassy, came to meet families of the disappeared at the SOS Disparus office. She was accompanied by Mme Katherine M. Leahy, political chargée at the embassy and Mme Bencheik Souad. She enquired as to how the Algerian authorities were handling the files on the disappeared and about the claims for truth and justice of the families; she also asked about the political and economic situation in Algeria and about the human rights situation.

The Coalition of associations of victims of the 90s launches a blog on the internet.

CFDA, Djazairouna and Somoud launched the Coalition's blog: it presents the member organisations of the Coalition and their activities (<http://www.coalition-verite-justice.org/>). This new tool presents a space for the petition 'All against impunity' designed to promote the 'Alternative Charter for Truth, Peace and Justice' which was adopted by the Coalition in May 2011

PRESS CLIPPING

[Press Clipping of the month of July](#)

[Press Clipping of the month of August](#)

[Press Clipping of the month of September](#)

[Press Clipping of the month of September](#)

PRESS RELEASE

[Death of Ali Merabet: An activist who has left us too soon](#)

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