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Argentinean experts train Algerians in interview techniques and sampling DNA

Following on from its programme in searching for the Truth, two experts from the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) led CFDA's training session in interview techniques and sampling DNA on 15 and 16 January. A dozen participants from different regions of the country benefited from this training, which follows on from the session led by an expert from EPAF in May 2014.

On the first day, the trainers discussed interviewing methods and provided the participants with many pointers. As a practical exercise, the participants drew up a radio campaign to present their mission and its goals to the families. They were also grouped into pairs so that the participants could conduct an interview.

The second day of the training focused on the identification process, the definition of DNA and how to compare the ante mortem and post mortem data of the missing persons. The participants then simulated sampling DNA and learnt how to reconstruct a family tree for a family of a missing person.

The training was very informative and intense, and the participants found it very interesting but, because of the technicality of the points discussed, thought it a shame that it only lasted

two days. CFDA therefore plans to organise other training sessions in interviewing techniques and DNA sampling.



“Denied of the truth in Algeria: graves marked with an X, mass graves and the refusal to implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee”

“The opacity of the Algerian political system explains the refusal of the Algerian authorities to, among others, shed light on the Truth of the crimes committed in the 1990s,” Madjid Benchikh.

And with this opening phrase, the seminar organised by SOS Disappeared for 17 January 2015 in Algiers entitled “Denied of the truth in Algeria: graves marked with an X, mass graves and the refusal to implement the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee”, began.

Madjid Benchikh, former dean of the Faculty of Law in Algiers and former president of Amnesty International in Algeria, demonstrated how and why the Algerian authorities refuse to start investigations to discover the truth of the fate of the thousands missing.

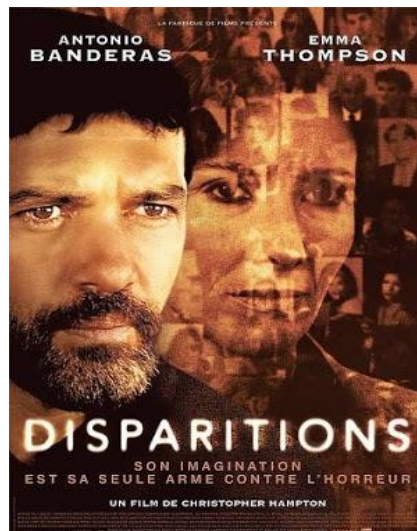
Mouloud Boumghar, professor of international human rights law, addressed the issue of unmarked and mass graves as well as the Algerian authorities’ refusal to respond positively to the families’ exhumation requests. To support his position, images of graves marked with an X taken by Hacène Ferhati were broadcast to the audience.

Nadia Bendjael, sister of a missing person, also told her story to illustrate the difficulties she faced in her attempts to uncover the truth on the fate of her missing brother. Nadia actually found her brother’s name in the El Alia cemetery records in Algiers which show that he died on 12 August 1994. The death certificate issued by the Kouba town hall, however, states that Mourad had been admitted to the morgue on 7 June 1994 and buried on 15 August 1994. Faced with this contradictory information, Nadia is still seeking the truth of her brother’s fate.

This was followed by the account of a wife of a missing person whose husband was taken by a group of armed Islamists, which held the attention of the entire audience captive. She told her story and all the hurdles she faced over the past 20 years to try to resolve the situation.

An EAAF specialist in forensic anthropology came from Argentina to share her experience on the forensic aspects of managing human remains and strategies in researching preliminary information.

The seminar ended on a presentation by an expert from Switzerland answering the question “how to ensure that the Algerian authorities implement the recommendations made by the Human Rights Committee”. The Algerian State has actually been condemned 28 times for the issue of enforced disappearance by the Human Rights Committee but completely ignores the recommendations issued by said Committee. Discussions are still ongoing with experts to attempt to find solutions to encourage the Algerian authorities to apply the recommendations made by the Human Rights Committee.



First screening and discussion in Oran

The Research and Documentation Centre for the Preservation of Memory organised its first screening and discussion on 31 January. A dozen people were present and watched the film “Disparition” [*Disappearance*] by Christopher Hampton. The story is set in 1970s Buenos Aires and follows Carlos’ search for his wife, a dissident journalist who disappeared after having been arrested by the secret police. Carlos then develops a sixth sense which allows him to see what happened to her and find her again.

Following the screening, a mother and a wife of a missing person told their accounts on the circumstances of the disappearance of their loved ones and the steps they had taken over the years to find them. These accounts illustrated in a more concrete way the difficulties shown in the film. Nassera Dutour, spokesperson for the CFDA, also spoke about the enforced disappearances in Algeria, having been to Argentina herself a few years before to meet experts of the EAAF.

The participants were invited to share their impressions and ask questions on enforced disappearance surrounded by refreshments. The Centre's manager distributed brochures and visitor cards to promote the Centre and advertise its future events.



CFDA at the World Social Forum

A delegation of the CFDA and Euro-Mediterranean Federation against Enforced Disappearances (FEMED) met at the World Social Forum which was held in Tunis from 24 until 28 March. The delegation was made up of loved ones of victims of enforced disappearance who came over from different countries.

They hosted a booth with banners, photos of missing persons and documentation to inform participants of the crime of enforced disappearance in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

A workshop entitled "Fighting against impunity and enforced disappearance in an authoritarian political environment" was held on the morning of 28 March. Around thirty people took part. Former victims of enforced disappearance and torture, loved ones of victims of these violations and representatives of the Tunisian civil society told their stories and shared their experiences in Algeria, Syria, Morocco and Tunisia.

News in brief

Round table for launching the EMHRN's report on the freedom of association

In December 2014, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN) published the second part of its report "Freedom of Assembly Threatened: The Silenced Opposition in the Euro-Mediterranean Region". This report is the focus of a round table debate organised for the 28 February by SOS Disappeared and the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (ALDHR).

This report suggests that ending the state of emergency in 2011 has far from relaxed the exercise of freedom of assembly and demonstration in Algeria.

Many experts were invited to take part in analysing the state of the freedom of assembly and demonstration in Algeria and the legislation encompassing these freedoms. The contributors also touched on the arrest of eight human rights' defenders for the unemployed on 11 February.

This report was then presented the following day, 1 March 2015, to journalists during a press conference held at the offices of SOS Disappeared.

Activists for the rights of the unemployed received prison sentence

On 11 February, eight human rights' defenders for the unemployed were sentenced to 12 months in prison, 6 months of which were suspended, for “*unarmed assembly which could affect the public peace*” in line with article 97 of the penal code and for having “*pressured the magistrates into making a decision*” in line with article 147 of the same code.

Their only “crime”, however, was having organised a peaceful assembly in front of the Laghouat tribunal on 28 January 2015 to protest against Mohamed Rag's trial, the human rights defender who also campaigns for human rights.

The eight activists are therefore now on hunger strike to protest against this sentence and have appealed.

The Laghouat Court of Appeal has confirmed this sentence in the first instance. Nevertheless, the public prosecutor has estimated that this punishment was too lenient and that the law has not been respected. He has thus filed an appeal to request a harsher sentence.

Gathering for the International Women's Day on 8 March: Nassera Dutour invited on the set of Echorouk TV

CFDA has called for a large gathering at the Place du 1^{er} Mai in Algiers for International Women's Day. They wish to highlight its support for the women, wives and daughters of those missing who do not know the truth behind the fate of their loved ones. More than fifty people took part in this gathering which was covered by the press.

On the afternoon of 8 March, Nassera Dutour was invited to talk with the wife of a missing person on the set of the channel Echorouk TV. The episode lasted more than forty minutes.