

Collectif
des
familles
de
disparu(e)s
en
Algérie

المفقودون DISPARUS
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TRUTH AND JUSTICE FOR THE DISAPPEARED IN ALGERIA

NEWSLETTER

Number 5– October/December 2002

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I wish to join the Families of the Disappeared in Algeria Collective and am sending my dues for 2003 (30 €).

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“100 MILLION CENTIMES AND A DEATH CERTIFICATE”

(Note: 100 million centimes is approximately 10 000 euros (£7 000))

The *CFDA* and *SOS Disparus*, in a communiqué dated 4 November, firmly denounced the statements that Farouk Ksentini (President of the *Commission nationale consultative pour la promotion et la protection des droits de l’Homme - CNCPPDH*) published in the newspaper *El Echourouk El Yaoumi* dated 3 November. These statements concerned the way to resolve the ‘disappeared’ problem in Algeria. For Ksentini, it is just a matter of handing over 100 million centimes and a death certificate to the families and then closing the case. The families of the ‘disappeared’ and their representatives naturally reacted very strongly to this proposal, recalling the indecency of being linked as though to merchandise and the impossibility of evaluating, without further right of appeal, a ‘disappeared’ to a sum of money. The families reaffirmed that their children were not ‘for sale, and don’t have a price’. They believe that it is imperative to demonstrate the truth about the situation of all those people abducted by the security forces, and disappeared since that time, and to obtain justice.

“The thought that one can dare to believe that a beloved human being can be replaced by a sum of money and a piece of paper is quite insupportable”.

For the families of the ‘disappeared’, this proposal shows once again the poor faith of the public services, and its contempt for the families.

THE CONTRADICTIONS

Before 5 September 2002, the families of the ‘disappeared’ and their representatives from Algiers, Constantine, Oran, Setif, Relizane and Mostaganem, had met Farouk Ksentini and had personally passed to him their Memorandum which contains the base principles for a common approach for settling

the case. This noted particularly the factors relative to “indemnification, which should under no circumstances replace or annul a truth process about the fate of their children, and should not replace the putting in place of a truly national policy of rehabilitation”.

At this meeting, F Ksentini subscribed to this approach and approved and supported all their demands. “I promise that all your demands will be transmitted to the President of the Republic” he told them. The families had hoped that the authorities would have the will to do something serious about this issue and put an end to the drama which thousands of people are living.

ENCIRCLED AND BEATEN

On 6 November 2002, and still as a reaction to Farouk Ksentini’s proposal of compensation, the families of the ‘disappeared’ decided to go to the Presidency of the Republic from their weekly meeting point in front of the CNCPPDH office. The objective of the march was to put the Memorandum in the hands of the President.

Scarcely had they gone 500 metres when the demonstrators at the head of the procession, mostly often elderly women, were blocked by a large number of organised security forces. They did not spare their insults or blows, punching and kicking.

Ibrahim Fakhar, a journalist from *El Fadjir*, who was following the demonstration on a professional basis, was struck before being led to Cavaignac police station where he was violently beaten. Another was menaced by an officer who told him: “If you write a word about me, I shall shoot you”.

WE ARE THE FORGOTTEN

SOS disparus called for a demonstration in front of the Presidency of the Republic in Algiers on 17 November 2002. This action followed on that of Wednesday 6 November 2002, in line with the refusal, repeated by the families of the ‘disappeared’, to accept the sum of “100 million centimes and a certificate

of death” (see above). Around a hundred people gathered in the morning in front of the Presidency, still hoping to hand their Memorandum to President Bouteflika. After talks with the police, who naturally refused access, the families were finally received by Mr Benachour, Minister of Public Relations, who refused to take the Memorandum on the pretext that it was not addressed to him. During the discussion, which took place in the presence of one of the republican guards and which lasted half an hour, the families renewed their complaints and demanded that the issue of the ‘disappeared’ be treated in the framework of truth and justice.

Although the families were accustomed to being surrounded by security forces deployed in numbers, and who chased them down to the office of the CNCPPDH, there were no acts of brutality that day.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LONDON 13-15 NOVEMBER

Replying to an invitation from the British section of Amnesty International, Nassera Dutour met members of Parliament and of the House of Lords as well as other political personalities and members of NGOs. She gave a lecture to members of the International Secretariat (and the British section AIUK). The visit terminated with a working meeting with British groups working on forced disappearances in Algeria.

Nassera Dutour underlined the importance of letters sent to the Algerian authorities by the groups (and of cards which describe the situation with a photo of the person) even if they never reply. Such action must not be under-estimated because the *Collectif* knows that all letters are read and brought to the attention of the government. It was suggested to members to keep contact with families and to explain to them how they were working on behalf of the relative. It was also explained to them that it is essential to inform families of ‘disappearances’ about their rights so that they can use all means to tackle the Algerian justice and the international institutions dealing with human rights.

HANNOVER 4-5 DECEMBER

In Hannover on 4 and 5 December, a public conference took place in the presence of journalist and this was followed by discussion with the AI Hannover group. This followed a meeting with Jochen Möller, Maghreb rapporteur from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The mayor of Hannover received us at the City Hall and a conversation took place about the Association Agreement that has been signed by Algeria and the European Union. We asked him to take this up with every deputy that he knows so that when the agreement comes before parliament for ratification they will not forget to raise the problem of the ‘disappeared’ in Algeria.

The next day, half an hour was spent with the local press and there was then a conference debate in Friedrichsdorf organised by the Hannover group. Nassera Dutour was interviewed on ‘Hessischer Rundfunk’, a regional radio. The tour ended with a visit to groups in five towns: Friedrichsdorf, Waiblingen near Stuttgart, Dachau, Munich and Ingolstadt. Public conferences and debates were organised and meetings took place with the press. Following a public conference in Dachau, Nassera Dutour attended a religious service in the Memorial concentration camp Protestant church. The minister, very moved by the situation of the families of the ‘disappeared’, promised to inform political personalities in his circle.

GERMAN TOUR: 2 - 3 DECEMBER

The *Collectif* spokesperson visited Germany at the invitation of the Amnesty International Algeria coordination group in Germany; she had been asked to inform groups and certain political personalities about the issue of forced disappearances in Algeria. The visit started by meeting the Maghreb delegation of the German parliament. The President of the group stated that he would pay particular attention to the ‘disappearances’ file. The visit was followed by a meeting with Barbara Lochbihler, Secretary General of AI Germany and Ruth Jüttner, Middle East rapporteur; it was an objective to establish the type of

action to be carried out. As in London, Nassera Dutour underlined the importance to several AI groups that she met to keep contact with the families of the 'disappeared' by writing to them to explain the type of work that they were doing. Siegfried Helijas, deputy and member of the 'foreign politics' working group and of the Committee for Economic Cooperation and Development of the German Parliament also met Nassera Dutour and learnt about the global issue of 'disappearances'. The deputy proposed to have a meeting with the Maghreb parliamentary group to exchange ideas. In addition, the *Collectif* spokesperson was able to explain, at a lunch with the Committee of Human Rights and in the presence of its President, Christa Nickels, the initiatives and objectives of the *Association*. Christa Nickels, very moved by the drama in which the families live, decided to adopt Nassera Dutour's son Amine Amrouche, 'disappeared' 30 January 1997.

Request for approval of SOS Disparu(e)s

The Board of *SOS Disparu(e)s* decided at its meeting on 9 September 2002 to register its constitution at the *Prefecture* and to ask for official recognition of the *association*. In order to do this, the families of the 'disappeared' rewrote the constitution in the light of a General Meeting. A provisional Board had been elected according to the procedure required for *associations*.

THE ALGIERS OFFICE

There is a Board meeting every Tuesday at the Head office of *SOS Disparu(e)s*. Visits are organised to various Algerian towns to meet the families of the 'disappeared' and to make up new files which are then dealt with in Algiers. A delegation from the office thus went to Jijel on 3 October 2002 and received 58 detailed files. On other occasions representatives from other regions came to Algiers: 98 files were brought from Jijel and 92 from the wilayas of Oran, Mascara, Mostaganem and neighbouring towns. Only some 15 files have been sent by mail.

A delegation also went to Oran in September to re-motivate the families in that region. following this the Oran committee put together nearly 100 files which were sent to *CFDA* in Paris.

INTIMIDATION OF FAMILIES OF THE 'DISAPPEARED'

On Wednesday 19 December, members of the *SOS Disparu(e)s* office went to meet families in Sidi Ghiliss near Cherchel in the wilaya of Tipaza (not far west of Algiers), where families of the 'disappeared' have been harassed by Military Security agents. This is particularly so of Mohamed Milihi, a member of *SOS Disparu(e)s*, who received the group from Algiers (his father has not reappeared since 9 February 1995). He has on two occasions been 'solicited' by military security officials who demanded if he had any 'news'. He stated that he told the two individuals, who he says are known in the area, that he is a member of *SOS Disparu(e)s*, and that he would take legal steps through his lawyer to stop their intimidation. It seems that the two military security agents have taken the threat seriously and have done nothing more.

ALGERIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Prior to the elections, an open letter was sent by *SOS Disparu(e)s* to all the political parties calling on them to engage, during their campaign, with the question of forced disappearances in Algeria. No party replied to the letter, and it was therefore decided that representative of *SOS Disparu(e)s* should participate at the meetings of the FFS, FLN, PT, etc and speak directly to the politicians about the issue. During a meeting of the FLN, families managed to speak when nobody wanted to let them: the response to their questions was to leave the rostrum.

IN BRIEF

THANKS TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, CANADA

Michel Grenette, Amnesty International Director General in Canada, organised a collection for the activities of *CFDA*

following the visit of Nassera Dutour to the Canadian AI section in March 2002. To date, a sum of 600 euros has been given to the *collectif*.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH VISIT TO ALGERIA

Eric Goldstein, on mission with Human Rights Watch, visited much of northern Algeria (Algiers, Relizane, Oran, Constantine). He met members of *SOS Disparu(e)s* as well as families and had several working meetings with them. Cases of forced disappearances and files were presented to him and he heard testimony from families prior to finalising the HRW report on forced disappearances.

THE US AMBASSADOR

SOS Disparu(e)s received Elin Tariat, who had just been named *chargé* of human rights at the US embassy in Algiers, and her political assistant Souad Echikh on 5 November 2002. Elin Tariat wished to hear the account of families of the 'disappeared' as well as to be informed about the situation of the 'disappeared' in Algeria. More particularly, she wished to know the position of *SOS Disparu(e)s* concerning the possible financial compensation and death certificates so that she could take up this problem with the Algerian authorities.

PREPARATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Nassera Dutour went to Algiers 2 - 6 November to prepare for an international conference on forced disappearances. This is being organised at the initiative of *Somoud* in partnership with *SOS Disparu(e)s* and in collaboration with *LADDH*. In the planning of the conference, which is due to be held 17 - 18 January 2003, several issues were raised: the legal and political aspects of forced disappearances, the witness and experience at an international level: ('disappeared' in Morocco, Lebanon, and Bosnia.....).

TRAINING IN BARCELONA 15 - 24 DECEMBER 2002

Amnesty International, in partnership with *SODEPAU*, organised a course in Barcelona. A delegation of members from each region (east, west and centre) was sent by *SOS Disparu(e)s* to participate. Among these, Hassen Ferhati, Treasurer of the *association*, who should have participated, was not able to leave Algeria because he has no passport. Previously, in September 2002, he had wanted to participate in a course on the rehabilitation of victims at the Ennadim Centre in Cairo. He is unable to obtain a passport although there are no reasonable reasons to justify this blockage in the Administration. Several people with a close relative 'disappeared' are in the same situation, without knowing the reasons.

DECEMBER

SOS Disparu(e)s organised a party on 25 December for children of the 'disappeared'. Some 100 children participated in this festive day during which they read poems that they had written themselves. The day was enlivened by a clown and the children were offered gifts and something to eat.

Salah Eddine Sidhoum, human rights defender, menaced

When it met the family of Salah-Eddine Sidhoum on 16 December, the *CFDA* was informed of acts of harassment. Salah-Eddine Sidhoum, surgeon and human rights campaigner, is regularly subject to menaces. In the 80s he was questioned and menaced by the political police for the position that he took in favour of freeing prisoners arrested during Berber Spring demonstrations. In the 90s he alerted the international community to the practice of torture, extra-judicial executions and the phenomenon of forced disappearances: he gathered and diffused the testimony of victims. He was arrested for the first time after the coup d'état on 11 January 1992, when he denounced violations committed by the police. When, in December 1994, three armed individuals broke into his home to kill him, he went into hiding.

CAS Abdelkader Mezouar

Abdelkader Mezouar, born on 6 March 1959, a bachelor living at Boumerdès, was abducted on 2 July 2002 by four armed persons travelling in a Renault Clio. This kidnapping took place in the presence of his nephew at Aïn Taya at 0700 hrs at the garage where he was working and lodging. According to the nephew, one of the officials dealt him a blow with an iron bar before handcuffing him. The father went to the *police station* in Heraoua and recovered the identity papers and the belt of his son. One of the policemen told him that he did not understand why the papers were there, but confirmed that Abdelkader Mezouar was suspected of having given armed groups logistical support. The following 29 July, a person from Algiers went to the father's home to tell him that his son was alive and detained at a military security barracks, without saying whether it was at Chateuneuf Bouzareah or Hydra. This person advised the father not to look into the matter, saying that the son had been imprisoned under a different name.