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Algeria: Terrorism and banditry; the people and organizations targeted by terrorist groups, and particularly the treatment of artists; measures taken by the state to fight terrorism and banditry

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Sources consulted by the Research Directorate state that acts of violence committed by armed groups in Algeria have greatly decreased (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2011; DNA 12 July 2010; US 5 August 2010). According to several sources, the 1990s were punctuated with violent attacks between Islamic militants and government forces (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2011; UPI 6 July 2010). The armed group Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is reportedly still active in Algeria (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2011; UPI 6 July 2010). This group is involved in attacks (Reuters 22 Nov. 2010; Freedom House 2010; STRATFOR 24 June 2009) and is described as the most active armed group in Algeria (US 21 Apr. 2011; APS 15 Apr. 2011). AQIM reportedly remains a "substantial" threat (US 21 Apr. 2011; UPI 6 July 2010).

Formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat, GSPC), the group assumed the AQIM name in 2007 after affiliating with Al-Qaida (UPI 6 July 2010; Human Rights Watch 16 Mar. 2010; National Consortium n.d.). According to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), a centre for studies at the University of Maryland sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security of the United States (US), the objective of the group is to overthrow the secular government of Algeria and replace it with an Islamist state (START n.d.). START claims that "salafi" means fundamentalist and, while not all Salafists are extremists, "Salafists believe in a 'pure' interpretation of the Koran" (ibid.). According to some sources, AQIM has 300 active armed members in Algeria (UPI 6 July 2010; National Consortium n.d.). According to the Algerian daily *L'Expression*, in 1994, there were more than 28,000 "terrorists" in Algeria, and in January 2010, there were between 600 and 800 (24 Jan. 2010).

Some sources note that the distinction between terrorists and bandits is vague in Algeria (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011; DNA 12 July 2010; *Le Monde* 19 Dec. 2010). The agency Algérie Presse Service (APS) also states that according to the coordinator for counterterrorism of the US Department of State, AQIM uses kidnapping for ransom as a source of funding for its activities (APS 15 Apr. 2011). However, some gangs are also taking part in kidnappings for ransom (*Le Monde* 19 Dec. 2010; DNA 12 July 2010). Because of the many kidnappings in Algeria, some sources refer to an abduction [translation] "industry" (*Le Monde* 19 Dec. 2010; DNA 12 July 2010).

Although mainly present in Algeria, AQIM also carries out attacks in other countries in North Africa (UPI 6 July 2010; Human Rights Watch 16 Mar. 2010; US 5 Aug. 2010). In Algeria, AQIM targets mainly the government security forces and foreign nationals (US 21 Apr. 2011; Freedom House 2010; STRATFOR 24 June 2009). In correspondence with the Research Directorate on 24 April 2011, a representative of the Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (Ligue algérienne pour la défense des droits de l'homme, LADDH), an independent non-governmental organization (NGO) (LADDH n.d.), explained that

[translation]

...during the previous decade, intellectuals, journalists, politicians and artists were particularly tracked down by [terrorist groups] but in recent years, military officers, police officers and all those who assist them (leaders of administrative ridings...) are particularly targeted, as well as state institutions.

Kidnappings and attacks against security forces are particularly frequent in the region of Kabylie (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011; *Le Monde* 19 Dec. 2010; Reuters 22 Nov. 2010). According to the Reuters news agency, Kabylie is one of the strongholds of the local section of Al-Qaida (ibid.). The LADDH representative specified the following:

[translation]

The regions of Boumerdès, Dellys and Tizi ousou [in Kabylie] are strongholds favoured by the terrorists, particularly because of the mountain massifs there. Furthermore, these regions are the scene of attacks and frequent searches: this is evident from the numerous barricades on the road that are impacting the lives of citizens in these regions (LADDH 24 Apr. 2011).

Sources indicate that AQIM committed the following attacks in 2009: a suicide bombing, which caused the death of two guards in March (Freedom House 2010; US 5 Aug. 2010); an ambush, which led to the death of 18 police officers in June (ibid.; Freedom House 2010; STRATFOR 24 June 2009); an attack that killed seven security guards in October (ibid.; US 5 Aug. 2010).

Treatment of artists

Information on the treatment of artists by the "terrorist" groups and bandits in Algeria since 2007 was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, some media indicate that the safety of artists has improved in the country since the end of the 1990s (*Jeune Afrique* 27 Jan. 2010; Reuters 18 Feb. 2009).

A Reuters article published 18 February 2009 indicates that in the 1990s, artists in Algiers were the targets of assassins and that the Algerian artistic life was marginalized. According to the article, artists, actors, playwrights and musicians were targeted by radical Islamists during this period (Reuters 18 Feb. 2009). Nevertheless, the article notes that some fear a new threat because of the increased popularity of religious conservatism (ibid.).

In an article regarding some Algerian artists exiled in France, the weekly Paris-based *Jeune Afrique* cites an artist in fine arts who stated that she could not exhibit all of her pieces in Algeria: [translation] "the Algerian society is too influenced by Islamism to not be shocked by my pieces that question religion" (27 Jan. 2010). However, *Jeune Afrique* also indicates that the authorities are trying to provide greater openness to artists (ibid.). The weekly reports that President Bouteflika stated the following:

[translation]

"Algeria is coming out of the throes of anarchy and terrorism, but the success of the national reconciliation would not be complete if it consisted merely of a victory over barbaric chaos. Algeria needs the paintbrushes of its painters, the eyes of its film directors, the performances of its actors and its dancers, the rhythms of its musicians and the writing of its literary women and men" (ibid.).

Measures taken by the state

Algeria is collaborating with other countries in North Africa in a regional fight against terrorism (UPI 6 July 2010; Reuters 17 Mar. 2010; Freedom House 2010). The

Algerian security forces are actively fighting terrorism (*Le Monde* 19 Dec. 2010; UPI 6 July 2010). According to the US Department of State, the fight against terrorism "appears to have reduced AQIM's overall effectiveness during the past two years" (US 5 Aug. 2010).

The state of emergency was lifted in Algeria in February 2011 (Algérie Plus 24 Feb. 2011; AFP 24 Feb. 2011; *Le Monde* 24 Feb. 2011). This state of emergency, imposed to fight the Islamist guerrillas, had been in place since 1992 (AFP 24 Feb. 2011; *Le Monde* 24 Feb. 2011). However, the army maintains control of the fight against terrorism in the country (AFP 24 Feb. 2011; Algérie Plus 24 Feb. 2011).

The Parisian newspaper *Le Monde* stated that in December 2010, Algeria launched the [translation] "largest military intervention in recent years against the AQIM combatants, and many thousands of military officers were mobilized and sent on the field" (19 Dec. 2010). According to the US Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), another military operation took place in fall 2010, during which hundreds of "terrorists" were arrested and many killed (US 21 Apr. 2011). An article published on 6 July 2010 by UPI states that several AQIM leaders surrendered in 2010, and that the Algerian army sent 3,000 additional soldiers to support the 15,000 already posted to fight terrorism near the borders in the south of the country. In addition, according to the US Department of State, the Algerian government implemented in 2008 a program to hire 100,000 new police officers and paramilitary police officers (US 5 Aug. 2010).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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