

Algeria highlights commitment to human rights treaties
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Local press highlights government's commitment to human rights treaties, after UN rights chief expressed concern about the freedom of NGOs in Algeria.

Pillay denounced: Bureaucratic restraints, harassment

ALGIERS - The Algerian press on Thursday highlighted the government's commitment to human rights treaties, after UN rights chief Navi Pillay ended her visit expressing concern about the freedom of NGOs in Algeria.

"Algerian authorities have shown their willingness to ratify laws against torture and enforced disappearances, a very complicated process whose implementation will take quite a long time," said French-language daily L'Expression.

Pillay, whose trip was the first to Algeria by a UN Human Rights Commissioner, said she was "very concerned" about problems facing Algerian NGOs, highlighting their role in helping to expose abuses.

She also told journalists she wanted to see a UN mission dispatched swiftly to help resolve the issue of forced disappearances during the civil war, after the government had agreed to accept this "long-standing request."

Algerian NGOs provide "one of the essential checks" that helps improve the human rights environment, she said late on Wednesday, by fighting for the rights of society's most vulnerable, and by exposing corruption and other abuses.

"(I have been) very concerned to hear that not only are they facing legal and bureaucratic restraints in Algeria, but some of their members are also being frequently harassed, intimidated and arbitrarily arrested by the security forces."

She also said she wanted to see a UN group of experts visit Algeria "quickly ...and without preconditions," to advise on how to deal with the issue of enforced disappearances, and for the government to ratify the convention on enforced disappearances.

"(This) would signal that the state is equally determined never to see a repetition of the terrible situation in the 1990s when several thousand people were forcibly disappeared by both the rebel forces and state security apparatus."

Twenty years ago, the military stepped in to stop the Islamic Salvation Front from winning Algeria's first multi-party legislative polls, sparking a civil war that lasted a decade and left up to 200,000 people dead.

Thousands remain unaccounted for.

A peace and reconciliation charter, adopted by referendum in 2005, pardons armed Islamists in exchange for their laying down of arms, and provides measures for victims of state violence.

The families of more than 6,000 people who disappeared accepted compensation, but Algerian NGOs say 25 percent of the concerned families refused, and those who were compensated have yet to receive their relatives' remains.

Protests demanding the truth about what happened are common.

Pillay, who during her trip met President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and other top Algerian officials, asked the government to take steps towards providing the victims' families with information about the fate of their lost relatives.

Algerian human rights official Farouk Ksentini had said earlier that the country had "nothing to hide" on the disappearances during the civil war.

Ksentini, who heads the national human rights commission, said his organisation was ready to supply all the information required by the United Nations on this "painful issue," cited by the country's APS news agency.

He added, however, that UN organisations had made a mistaken assessment of the civil war, in considering that the state was "not fighting terrorism, but waging war on the civilian population, or an armed opposition, which was not true."

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