



Algeria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Friday 18 December 2015

Treatment of Berbers including social, economic and political issues

A document produced in January 2014 by the *Governance and Social Development Resource Centre* states that:

“The government has made a number of concessions to Berber communities following discontent over its arabisation policies. Berber protests tend to be related to broader social issues...” (Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (January 2014) *Conflict Analysis of Algeria*, p.5)

This report also states that:

“...the state has pursued Arabisation policies in national education and politics, that are seen by some Berbers as disadvantageous.” Berber groups in the Kabylia region have been particularly focused on demanding language and cultural rights...Periodic unrest in Kabylia has been caused by perceived official discrimination and neglect...The region has also become increasingly isolated economically, as a result of AQIM activity and connected security measures, which have made it hard for businesses to operate in the area...” (ibid, p.14)

The *Jamestown Foundation* in May 2014 notes in a report that:

“Berber people are well integrated in the social, political and economic structure of the country.” (Jamestown Foundation (2 May 2014) *Algeria's Political Transition Begins in the Midst of Major Security Challenges*)

The *International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs* released a report in April 2015 stating that:

“The Amazigh in Algeria are unable to benefit from the natural resources found on their lands and territories (water, forests, oil and gas).” (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (April 2015) *The Indigenous World 2015*, p.361)

A report published in June 2015 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of 2014 notes:

“The ethnic Amazigh (Berber) population of approximately 10 million participated freely and actively in the political process and represented more than one-third of the government.” (United States Department of State (25 June 2015) *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014, Algeria*, p.22)

This document also states:

“Security forces failed to prevent and respond adequately to intercommunity violence in the city of Ghardaia, 370 miles south of Algiers, that restarted in December 2013. Violence between the two ethnically and religiously different Mozabite (Berber) and

Malikite (Arab) communities claimed the lives of 13 persons and injured several hundred during a period of several months.” (ibid, p.32)

A report published in July 2015 commenting on events of 2014 by *Freedom House* points out that:

“Algeria's ethnic composition is a mixture of Arabs and Berbers. In recent years, following outbreaks of antigovernment violence in the Berber community, officials have made more of an effort to recognize Berber cultural demands. Tamazight, the Berber language, is now a national language. However, in March, intercommunal violence in Ghardaia killed three, and two more were killed in violence in October. After the March violence, Berber leaders alleged pro-Arab bias within the security forces and called for greater autonomy from the central government.” (Freedom House (10 July 2015) *Freedom in the World 2015 – Algeria*)

Agence France Presse in July 2015 points out that:

“Berbers represent around 30 percent of the Algerian population and have long considered themselves marginalised by the country's dominant Arab culture.” (Agence France Presse (9 July 2015) *Algeria mobilises army against ethnic violence in south*)

In July 2015 an article released by *Agence France-Presse* states:

“At least 22 people have died in fighting between Berbers and Arabs in southern Algeria, the bloodiest toll in two years of frequent clashes between the communities, national news agency APS reported Wednesday.” (Agence France-Presse (9 July 2015) *22 dead in Arab-Berber unrest in Algeria: media*)

A report published in July 2015 by *Qantara* notes:

“Hostilities between Berbers and Arab tribes in eastern Algeria in early July claimed at least 22 lives and left dozens injured.” (Qantara (20 July 2015) *Conflict between Arabs and Berbers in Algeria: A social minefield*)

This document also notes that:

“Arabs and Berbers have lived together peacefully in Algeria for a long time. The two groups differ at least in part in their religion and language. The Berbers make up about 30 per cent of Algeria's population, but in the province of Ghardaia, they have been in the majority for centuries. The Berbers there are adherents of the Ibadi school of Islam, which goes back to the denominational divisions in the early days of the religion. The Arabs, by contrast, are Sunni Muslims. Only in recent decades have many Arabs migrated to the region, which is regarded as the gateway to the Sahara. As the government pushed for the Arabisation of the population, many Berbers came to feel discriminated against for their language and culture. The first clashes between the two groups occurred in late 2013. Ever since then, there have been regular skirmishes between Berbers and Arabs. However, this is the first time that the death toll has been so high and the damage so severe.” (ibid)

The *Associated Press* in July 2015 states:

“Ghardaia, a UNESCO world heritage site, has been at the epicenter of the unrest. Members of the local Berber community, known as Mozabites, speak their own language and follow a different school of Islam than the majority of Algerians. The two groups compete over limited jobs, land and housing in the impoverished south.” (Associated Press (8 July 2015) *Algeria's President Orders Crackdown on Ethnic Unrest*)

In August 2015 the *Agence France Presse* points out that:

“Language policy has proved controversial throughout Algeria's modern history. Berber was finally recognised as a national, but not an official, language in 2002, allowing it to be taught as a second language in some Berber areas. But even that reform came only after decades of protests in the most populous Berber-speaking region, Kabylie, east of Algiers, many of which were bloodily suppressed.” (Agence France Presse (5 August 2015) *Algeria school language reform hits nationalist raw nerve*)

Human Rights Watch in August 2015 notes:

“Algerian authorities should release or try within a reasonable time in a fair and open trial a pro-Amazigh activist, Kameleddine Fekhar, and his 24 co-defendants, Human Rights Watch said today. Fekhar has since 2013 called for autonomy of the Mزاب, a northern Sahara region, and has condemned the government for what he called complicity in crimes against humanity by Sunni Arabs against the Amazigh, or Berber, ethnic minority in the region. All have been in pretrial detention since July 9, 2015. They face the same charges, which include participating in a terrorist act and inciting hatred, for their alleged role in violent confrontations between the Amazigh and the Arab communities on July 7 in the Mزاب. The accused, all from the region, could face the death penalty.” (Human Rights Watch (25 August 2015) *Algeria: Pro-Autonomy Activists Detained*)

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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