



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Algeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 July 2011

Treatment of protesters in February/March 2011

A report published in March 2011 by *Reporters Without Borders* noted under the heading 'Algeria':

"Half an hour before the scheduled start of a demonstration called by the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD) in Oran (430 km west of Algiers) on 5 March, the police arrested around 100 people including a dozen journalists, although they showed their press cards. They were taken to different police stations and then freed after about half an hour. The journalists concerned worked for *Soir d'Algérie*, *Liberté*, *Le Quotidien d'Oran*, *El Watan*, *L'Expression*, *La Tribune* and *La Voix de l'Oranie*.

The authorities also prevented a march from taking place the same day in Batna (425 km southeast of the capital). Several dozen protesters had gathered, shouting slogans demanding political change. Around 10 were briefly arrested and police confiscated Rachid Hamatou's camera.

These violations of the right of assembly and media freedom occurred regardless of the government's announcement on 24 February that the state of emergency introduced in 1992 was being lifted throughout the country except the capital." (Reporters Without Borders (8 March 2011) *Overview of media freedom violations of past few days*)

A report from *Euro News* dated 23 March 2011 noted:

"Violent clashes have broken out in Algiers, the Algerian capital, injuring around 40 protesters.

Eyewitnesses said about 150 people, mostly youths, confronted security forces in the poor Algiers neighbourhood of Oued Koreich after police attempted to clear out a run-down housing estate. Built around 50 years ago, the area has been earmarked for destruction.

Perhaps fearful of the recent riots that have hit Algeria and other Arab countries, police responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. One young protester was reportedly hit in the eye." (Euro News (23 March 2011) *Dozens injured in Algiers as police clear slums*)

A report from *Al Jazeera* published in March states:

"Police in Algeria's capital have used teargas to disperse a crowd of young men who threw stones and petrol bombs to try to stop bulldozers demolishing dozens of illegally built homes.

Wednesday's riot was unusually violent and took place at a time when Algerian authorities are wary of any sign of contagion from the unrest elsewhere in the Arab world.

A police spokesman said 50 officers were injured in the clashes. Reporters on the spot said the demonstrators replied with iron bars and stones.

The newspaper El Watan said at least five vehicles had been set on fire, including a police truck attacked by young people.

The confrontation, in the Oued Koriche suburb of Algiers, began when local officials ordered the demolition of more than 30 houses built on publicly-owned land without a permit.

Police in protective gear formed a shield around bulldozers which moved in to demolish the houses, but they came under attack from about 100 young men.

After a few hours all the illegal buildings were knocked down and the confrontation ended." (Al Jazeera (23 March 2011) *Clashes in Algeria over housing row*)

A report from *Africa News* published in February 2011 notes:

"Algerian riot police have attempted to break up a rally of anti-government protesters in in a central square in Algiers on Saturday.

Security forces are clamping down on the capital where demonstrators have been emboldened by uprisings in Tunisia and in Egypt.

All roads leading to May 1 Square were blocked and metal barricades were set up to prevent protesters from entering.

"The march was supposed to take place at 10 AM, but at 10:10, police quickly surrounded them and just pushed them back, Elias Filali, a blogger and activist who was at the rally told RFI. The police "divided the crowd into small groups and pushed them into different alleyways," he said." (Africa News (19 February 2011) *Algeria; Riot Police Break Up Protest in Algiers*)

The report also notes:

"Saturday's rally was organised by the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD), a month-old umbrella group made up of the political opposition, the Algerian human rights league and trade unions.

Filali said that police are being equally as heavy handed as with last weekend's rally which was quickly crushed by police. He also said that people who are detained are all eventually released, but are held for at least 10 hours.

"It's just a very very cruel regime here," he said." (ibid)

A report from *Agence Europe* published in February 2011 notes:

"The EMHRN (Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network) has strongly condemned the repression of peaceful marches and protests organised on Saturday 19 February

(by the Coordination nationale pour le changement et la démocratie - CNCD). These demonstrations followed those that took place a week earlier.

The EU should also publicly condemn the use of force by the Algerian authorities during the peaceful demonstrations, emphasises the EMHRN. It says that Algeria is obliged to ensure the safety of demonstrators during peaceful marches and calls on its government to "unreservedly lift the state of emergency, respect international human rights commitments, begin a dialogue with all components of the population and civil society, and put into place democratic reforms". (Agence Europe (24 February 2011) *(EU) EU/ALGERIA: EMHRN strongly condemns repression*)

A report from *Agence France Presse* published in February 2011 notes:

"The head of the European Parliament demanded Sunday that demonstrators arrested during an Algerian attempt to echo Tunisian and Egyptian protests be released "immediately."

Urging Algiers to "refrain from violence and respect their citizens' right to peaceful demonstration," after protests in the capital on Saturday, Jerzy Buzek underlined that "any and all demonstrators arrested should be released immediately."

Algeria's interior ministry said 14 people had been held and then released, but the head of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH), Mustapha Bouchachi, said there had been 300 arrests in various Algerian centres." (Agence France Presse (13 February 2011) *EU chief demands 'immediate' release of Algeria protesters*)

A report from the *African Commission on Human and People's Rights* notes it is:

"Deeply concerned by the human rights violations in North Africa in general and the deterioration of the political and human rights situation in Algeria in particular, following legitimate claims of the population, for greater freedom and better democratic governance;

Concerned by the arbitrary arrests and unconscionable detentions, the sustained suppression of the demonstrations and popular protest movements, the establishment of the curfew and the upsurge of violence in Algeria which gave rise to loss in human lives;

Strongly condemns the excessive and disproportionate use of force to suppress the will for reform and the aspirations to democracy and good governance legitimately expressed by the People of Algeria; [...]

Invites the Algerian Government to refrain from all excessive and disproportionate use of force during popular demonstrations and protest movements;" (African Commission on Human and People's Rights (1 March 2011) *Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in Algeria*)

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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