



Algeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 31 January 2018

Any information on a conflict in southern Algeria in 2011 between the Benmizab tribe and the Suni. Is this conflict ongoing?

A 1996 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the Beni Mzab tribe states:

“The Beni Mzab is a small clan that is geographically centred around the city of Ghardia. The notion of ‘hard work’ is highly valued in the Beni Mzab culture, and they are known for this quality among the Algerian population. The Beni Mzab are mainly traders. There are few intermarriages with other Berber clans or with the Arabs. The Beni Mzab are a ‘highly religious people’ and are part of the Islamic sect of the ‘Ibdite’ that is associated with the Shi’a movement. The source stated that religious beliefs and ideology were not factors in the clashes between the Beni Mzab and the Islamists.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1 February 1996) *Algeria: Information on the Beni Mzab tribe, specifically on their treatment by the government and the Islamists*)

A 2005 Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia research response states:

“Far less numerous than their northern Berber kin are the Mzab, whose number was estimated at 100,000 in the mid-1980s. They live beside the Oued Mzab, from which comes their name. Ghardaïa was their largest and most important oasis community. The Mzab are Ibadi (see Glossary) Muslims who practice a puritanical form of Islam that emphasizes asceticism, literacy for men and women, and social egalitarianism.” (Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia (31 October 2005) *Algeria – Kabylia – Berbers – Homosexuals – Citizens’ Movement – Azru Medyazen – Christians – Internal relocation – Asylum seekers*)

A report from the Middle East Media Research Institute states:

“The Mozabite people (Ait M'zab) are Amazigh (Berbers) who live in the M'zab valley in the northern Sahara in Algeria. The community, comprising some 300,000, is indigenous to the region, but today its survival is in question.

In December 2013 and January 2014, the Mozabites were the target of attacks by the Arab Chaamba people; the attacks occurred in several neighborhoods of Ghardaia, the capital city of the M'zab province, some 600 km south of Algiers. Mozabites were assaulted, Mozabite-owned shops were ransacked, and the city center was burned down in the clashes that ensued.” (Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) (6 February 2014) *Human Rights Violations In Algeria: The Mozabite People Under Attack*)

The Introduction to a report published by the International Crisis Group states:

“Since 2013, intercommunal clashes between Ibadi Mozabites and Sunni Maliki Arabs in the Mzab Valley have led to dozens of deaths, the burning and looting of thousands of businesses and homes and the destruction of cultural heritage sites, including a UNESCO-classified Ibadite shrine.” (International Crisis Group (21 November 2016) *Algeria’s South: Trouble’s Bellwether*, p.1)

A report from the Jamestown Foundation states:

“The ongoing Berber cultural revival in North Africa has gone hand-in-hand with a new political assertiveness. In nations such as Libya, Algeria and Mali, this has at times resulted in armed clashes and protests demanding linguistic rights and political recognition of Berber (Amazigh) communities. The latest of these confrontations is now underway in the south Algerian oasis of Ghardaïa, where Chaamba Arabs have clashed repeatedly with the indigenous Mozabite Berbers, forcing Algiers to send security forces to restore law and order in the region.

Communal violence broke out in May 2013 following an alleged attempt by Chaamba Arabs to use forged property records to take over a Mozabite cemetery. The dispute degenerated into sword-wielding youth gangs throwing petrol bombs at each other in the streets of Ghardaïa, the largest city in the M'zab Valley. Shops were also burned in Berriane as the violence spread to the other cities of the M'zab.” (Jamestown Foundation (7 February 2014) *Berber-Arab Clashed in Algeria's M'zab Valley*)

A 2014 Amnesty International media briefing states:

“Difficult economic conditions and clashes in the southern city of Ghardaia have inflamed tensions between Mozabites, who are part of Algeria's Amazigh population and practice the Ibadite form of Islam, and Arabs from the Mzab valley who follow the Maliki rites dominant in the Maghreb. Although tensions surface every few years, recent clashes have been unusually violent, leaving eight dead since the beginning of 2014, according to media reports, and has left the mausoleums desecrated. The security forces have been accused of failing to intervene in a timely manner to protect people, as well as of at times participating in clashes in support of one community against the other and of ill-treating those they arrest.” (Amnesty International (14 April 2014) *Algeria: Key human rights concerns ahead of presidential elections*)

A report published by Qantara, an internet portal founded on the initiative of the German Foreign Office, in a section headed “The Chaamba and the Mozabite”, states:

“Mozabites are among the Algerian groups known as Berbers or Imazighen – both terms that are problematic and not viewed as suitable by all members of the ethnic groups in question. They belong to the Ibadi religious minority and, traditionally, lived and worked as merchants in the M'zab, where they also form the majority population.

The Chaamba, on the other hand, see themselves as Arabs and as followers of the Maliki approach to Islamic law. They used to be Bedouins who mainly made a living breeding camels until they were forced to give up their nomadic

life first by colonialist policy and then by the Algerian policies of President Houari Boumediene following the country's independence in 1962. They too settled in the M'zab.

Both groups accuse one another of marginalisation. The Chaamba say the Mozabites have used exclusive social structures and their own schools, mosques and cemeteries to hamper the integration of the Chaamba, with whom they want no relations.

For their part, the Mozabites say the Chaamba marched in arrogantly and, as Arabs, get preferential treatment from the Algerian government in the form of easier access to administrative jobs or living space. The Mozabites also feel that the construction of more and more new villages and districts by the Arab newcomers is systematically displacing them and threatening their identity.

'Essentially, the Arab population confronts ethnic minorities with a sense of superiority,' says Ulrich Delius, a specialist on African affairs with the Society for Threatened Peoples, speaking to Qantara.de. He goes on to say that this is a result of 50 years of Arabisation policies that have led Arab Algerians not to see their state as a multi-ethnic place with room for Berber communities, but solely as an Arab nation." (Qantara (22 July 2014) *Ethnic conflict in Algeria: A struggle for power and recognition*)

A 2013 report from Agence France Presse states:

"Six policemen were injured in clashes between rival communities in the Algerian oasis town of Ghardaia, a security source and a human rights activist said on Tuesday. Four people were arrested in connection with Monday's violence between young Chaambas of Arab origin and Mozabites, a Berber minority group which adheres to the Ibadi faith, an offshoot of Shiite Islam." (Agence France Presse (1 October 2013) *6 police wounded during violence in Algeria desert*)

A 2014 report from Al-Arab Online states:

"Weeks of violence between two rival communities have swept Algeria's desert city of Ghardaia, enflamed by the destruction of a historic Berber shrine, with analysts warning of sectarian conflict engulfing the fragile region. For more than a month, the city of 90,000 inhabitants has witnessed clashes between the Chaamba community of Arab origin and the majority Mozabites, indigenous Berbers belonging to the Ibadi Muslim sect. Three people were killed in the violence, which both sides accused the other of starting. Houses were looted and burned, shops and schools closed and thousands of police deployed as the authorities scrambled to contain the unrest." (Al-Arab Online (30 January 2014) *Sectarian violence threatens Algeria desert region*)

An Agence France Presse report states:

"The UNESCO world heritage site, some 600 kilometres (370 miles) south of Algiers, has been rocked since December by clashes between the Chaamba community of Arab origin and the majority Mozabites, indigenous Berbers belonging to the Ibadi Muslim sect. The oasis settlement, with a population of 90,000, was a scene of desolation on Monday, with the normally bustling market square empty and charred shopfronts bearing witness to last week's

unrest. Security forces patrolled the streets following the deployment of extra personnel, and after Algeria's newly-appointed premier Youcef Yousfi visited on Sunday in a bid to defuse the situation. The latest violence erupted after hundreds of Mozabites who had fled during the initial unrest returned to their houses to find many of them destroyed or badly damaged, according to various local sources. Three young Chaambas were killed on Saturday night, in circumstances that remain unclear, and another 190 people wounded, including 29 members of the security forces, according to medical sources.” (Agence France Presse (17 March 2014) *Deadly sectarian violence cripples Algeria desert city*)

A report from the Italian news agency ANSAmed states:

“Mozabite people, a Berber ethnic group, were the absolute majority - politically, socially and economically strong - in a number of important southern Algerian provinces until independence from France. That golden age is over for this proud population of Berbers, as proven by the language they talk. Now, with pride and outrage, they are taking to the streets to ask central authorities in Algiers to end a wave of violence over the past ten months, which the minority is convinced is racially-motivated. In Algiers, in front of the press house, as well as in other Algerian provinces, dozens of community members have protested to recall to Premier Sellal his government's many broken promises. The situation has turned more violent at the end of last year, when clashes between Mozabite and Chamba Arab factions have become more frequent and more violent. Over the past five decades, the community has boosted its presence in provinces once inhabited almost exclusively by the Mozabite minority, which now feels in danger. When night falls, the communities' different neighbourhoods are guarded by groups of youths who are ready to signal the arrival of 'enemies' who often vandalise and ransack homes and stores.” (ANSAmed (7 July 2014) *Algeria: racism looming over Mozabite minority: Berber group protesting against Arab violence in south*)

A report from the Business Monitor Online states:

“At least 25 people have been killed and 30 injured in ethnic and sectarian clashes between Arab and Berber communities in Algeria's southern province of Ghardaia, the Algerie Presse Service (APS) reports. According to APS, 19 people died during clashes between ethnic Mozabite Berbers and Chaamba Arabs on July 7, while six more were killed on July 8.” (Business Monitor Online (10 July 2015) *At Least 25 Killed in Ethnic Clashes In Ghardaïa*)

A report from Al Jazeera states:

“Renewed clashes between Mozabite Berbers and Chaamba Arabs in Ghardaia province, 600km south of Algeria's capital Algiers, have killed more than 20 people and wounded 300 others. They are the bloodiest clashes since on-and-off fighting began two years ago. In response to the flare-up of violence earlier this month, Algeria's ailing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika opted to send army troops to Ghardaia. Located in the centre of the country, Ghardaia is now home to two ethnic communities that share a long history of rivalry over land ownership, property and housing. Berber Mozabites are Ibadis, following a form of Islam that is distinct from Sunni and Shia, while

Chaamba Arabs, originally Bedouins, practise the Maliki approach to Islamic.”
(Al Jazeera (20 July 2015) *Renewed tensions grip Algeria's Ghardaia*)

A report from Human Rights Watch states:

“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*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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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