



## **Algeria - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Wednesday 8 May 2019**

### **Information on the current situation including: reasons for protests; treatment of protesters; current leadership after Bouteflika; & type of political system**

A report issued in March 2019 by the *United States Department of State* commenting on events of 2018 points out that:

“Algeria is a multiparty republic whose president, the head of state, is elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The president has the constitutional authority to appoint and dismiss cabinet members and the prime minister, who is the head of government. A 2016 constitutional revision requires the president to consult with the parliamentary majority before appointing the prime minister” (United States Department of State (13 March 2019) *Algeria 2018 Human Rights Report*, p.1).

A publication released by *Freedom House* in 2019 reviewing events of the preceding year notes that:

“The executive is extremely powerful, and Parliament plays only a marginal role in Policymaking” (Freedom House (2019) *Freedom in the World 2019, Algeria*, p.4).

*BBC News* in February 2019 states that:

“Thousands of people gathered across Algeria on Friday to protest President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's plans to run for a fifth term. Security forces in riot gear fired tear gas to block a march on to the presidential palace in the capital, Algiers. But protests in the rest of country passed off peacefully” (BBC News (22 February 2019) *Algerians protest against Bouteflika's bid for fifth term*).

A report issued in March 2019 by *Human Rights Watch* states:

“Algerian authorities should allow Algerians to assemble peacefully and refrain from using excessive force against demonstrators opposing a fifth term for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika...During huge demonstrations on March 1, 2019, security forces used teargas to disperse the crowd approaching the office of the president. In previous demonstrations that began on February 22, Algerian authorities arbitrarily arrested demonstrators and journalists. Authorities have also refused to authorize meetings of a protest movement opposing a fifth term” (Human Rights Watch (2 March 2019) *Algeria: Arbitrary Arrests at Election Protests*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Thousands of Algerians have taken to the streets since February 22 in various cities to oppose a new term for their ailing president, who has been in office since 1999” (ibid, p.1).

A report issued in March 2019 by the *International Crisis Group* states that:

“Bouteflika's announcement that he would run for a fifth term prompted a sense of national humiliation. Many protesters believe that the president is squandering Algeria's potential and that his exploitation by interest groups around him borders on the absurd, given his poor health. Some also say that Algeria has lost too much time and that, had Bouteflika stepped aside in 2014, reforms could have elevated the country to a major economic power by now. While Bouteflika's decision to run for a fifth term triggered the protest movement, the public outcry also expresses something deeper: a desire to reclaim the street, as public demonstrations have been banned in the capital since 2001” (International Crisis Group (7 March 2019) *Algeria's Pre-election Protests Put Ageing Regime Under Pressure*, p.2).

In March 2019 *Human Rights Watch* states that:

“Algerians have become disillusioned by promised reforms that never materialized” (Human Rights Watch (21 March 2019) *Amid Revolution, Algeria is Unstable – And Deep, Real Reforms are the Only Way Forward*

This document also states that:

“The protest was centred around Mr. Bouteflika, but was more broadly about a repressive system that protesters want to end” (ibid).

In March 2019 *Amnesty International* states that:

“Algerian authorities must stop prosecuting peaceful protesters and allow the judiciary to function independently... Since a wave of protests began on 22 February to oppose President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's bid to run for a fifth term in office, at least 311 people have been arrested according to the Algerian General Directorate of National Security. Protesters have been charged with "unarmed gatherings", acts of violence and theft” (Amnesty International (28 March 2019) *Algeria: Authorities must stop prosecuting peaceful protesters*).

A report published in April 2019 by *Human Rights Watch* points out that:

“Millions of Algerians have marched since February 22 in various cities to oppose a new term for their ailing president, in defiance of a ban on demonstrations that had been among the many restrictions on human rights enforced for decades by Algerian authorities” (Human Rights Watch (9 April 2019) *Algeria: Bouteflika Resignation an Opening for Rights*, p.1).

A report issued by *Human Rights Watch* in April 2019 states that:

“Algerian authorities have resumed forcibly dispersing peaceful demonstrations and arbitrarily detaining protesters in the capital, Algiers... The government crackdown is an apparent attempt to curb the massive pro-democracy marches that have taken place weekly since February 2019 and forced the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika on April 2” (Human Rights Watch (19 April 2019) *Algeria: Police Renew Crackdown on Mass Protests*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“The protest movement first formed to oppose a presidential run by the ailing Bouteflika for a fifth five-year term in elections originally scheduled for April. On April 10, the Algerian parliament confirmed upper house speaker Abdelkader Ben Salah

as interim president for 90 days. Ben Salah announced that a new presidential election would be held on July 4. Security forces have responded inconsistently to the protests. On February 22 and on subsequent days, the security forces dispersed street rallies and arbitrarily arrested dozens of protesters, detaining some for hours, then releasing them without charge. Then in March, security forces allowed huge marches in the capital each Friday, with only minimal interference. During April, security forces forcibly blocked smaller sit-ins and protests held on other days of the week” (ibid, p.1).

In April 2019 the *International Crisis Group* states in a report that:

“On 2 April, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria's aging and ailing president, resigned under pressure from the military. The move was the result of five weeks of street protests at the prospect of Bouteflika running for an unprecedented fifth term in elections originally scheduled for mid-April” (International Crisis Group (26 April 2019) *Post-Bouteflika Algeria: Growing Protests, Signs of Repression*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“It took five weeks of street protests to end the reign of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, thwarting his fifth term as president. But now, three weeks later, a stalemate looms as protesters and security forces disagree on the pace and content of a political transition. Key regime figures rejected by the street remain in power, prompting demonstrators to call for a clean break with the past: the departure of all Bouteflika-era figures and the drafting of a new constitution. In response, the authorities have banned all demonstrations, apart from those held on Fridays, and are showing a new assertiveness” (ibid, p.1).

This report also states that:

“So far, the protests have lacked any identifiable organisation or leadership. No political figure has stood out or spoken up; the only voices to be heard have been those of ordinary citizens. Independent trade unions, human rights associations and youth groups – all capable of staging protests on their own – have effectively replaced opposition political parties, some of which at times have been part of the government, as the political address of Algerian dissent. Protesters associate these parties with le pouvoir. They are demanding a transition of power to a new generation – new faces that have never been part of or close to the system...The lack of identifiable leadership among protesters allows for staging mass action but not for formulating a clear set of broadly supported demands. Political parties are trying to take advantage of this weakness to stage a comeback, and they have seized upon the elections question in particular” (ibid, p.3).

In May 2019 *Reuters* states that:

“Bouteflika's exit has not quieted protesters, who are now demanding the dismantling of an entire ruling elite entrenched for decades, a shift towards more democracy and a crackdown on systemic corruption and cronyism...The army remains the most powerful institution in Algeria, a major oil and natural gas producer, having swayed politics from the shadows for decades. It has so far patiently monitored the mostly peaceful protests that at times have swelled to hundreds of thousands of people” (Reuters (1 May 2019) *Algeria's army chief of staff says military will prevent violence in country: TV*

A report issued in May 2019 by *BBC News* states that:

“The brother of ousted Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and two former intelligence chiefs have been arrested, reports say...It comes after weeks of mass protests calling for the complete overthrow of the country's elite. A number of high-profile figures have become subject to investigation since...Mr Bouteflika's brother was considered by many as Algeria's de facto leader since his brother suffered a stroke in 2013. The head of the army, Lt Gen Gaid Salah, had previously accused Mr Mediene, better known as General Toufik, of conspiring against the army and the people. Mr Tartag succeeded Mr Toufik in 2015, but was himself dismissed on 5 April, shortly after Mr Bouteflika stepped down. The former president, who had been in power for 20 years, resigned last month after months of anti-government protests. Abdelkader Bensalah, the former head of the Senate, took over as interim leader and has vowed to hold free elections in July. However, demonstrators also want him to resign and have continued to call for more radical change. Many have called for the downfall of "Le Pouvoir", or the establishment, meaning that all those around the former president should also go” (BBC News (4 May 2019) *Algeria protests: 'Bouteflika's brother arrested'*).

In May 2019 *Reuters* states:

“Massive protests calling for a radical change to Bouteflika's government pushed the ailing president to resign on April 2. Demonstrators continue to demand the removal of all those linked the former administration” (Reuters (5 May 2019) *Brother of Algeria's ex-President Bouteflika placed in custody by military judge: state tv*).

In May 2019 the *Agence France Presse* states in a document that:

“With interim president Abdelkader Bensalah lacking political legitimacy, Gaid Salah appears to be in sole command...The arrests of Said Bouteflika and the two ex-spy bosses were the latest to target the ousted president's inner circle, in effect decapitating Algeria's ruling elite. Numerous powerful and wealthy businessmen, including the country's richest man Issad Rebrab, have also been detained over suspected corruption. More than a month after the departure of Bouteflika, protesters remain on the streets to demand an overhaul of the entire ruling system -- including the removal of Gaid Salah” (Agence France Presse (7 May 2019) *What lies behind Algeria arrests of Bouteflika clan?*, p.2).

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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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