
ALGERIA

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Population: 32.9 million (12.0 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 137,500

Compulsory recruitment age: 19

Voluntary recruitment age: unclear

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: not signed

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

Although the voluntary recruitment age remained unclear, children did not appear to have been recruited into government armed forces.

Context

Algeria continued to be affected by the legacy of violent internal conflict of the 1990s which, by the end of 2006, had claimed over 200,000 lives. A process of National Reconciliation was under way, under which the government introduced amnesty measures, exemptions and impunity for past human rights abuses by government forces and former armed group members.¹ Fighting between armed groups and government security forces persisted and violence continued throughout 2007.² The government continued its military campaign against armed groups which it claimed were aligned with al-Qaeda, and carried out search operations in which alleged armed group members were killed. There were concerns that women and children related to armed group members were also killed.³

The Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (Groupe Salafiste de Predication et de Combat, GSPC), an offshoot of the now defunct Armed Islamic Group (Groupe islamique armé, GIA), announced in September 2006 that it had joined forces with al-Qaeda and at the start of 2007 officially renamed itself as the al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb. This was accompanied by increased attacks against commercial and military targets in 2007.⁴ Following the April 2007 suicide bomb attacks claimed by the GSPC in Algiers, in which some 30 people were killed, an estimated 80 Algerian men, many of whom were thought to have received training in Iraq, were arrested by Algerian authorities.⁵

According to press reports, there were incidents in 2006 involving the kidnapping and rape of girls by armed groups. In May 2006 the bodies of 22 children were found in the province of Jijel. They were alleged to have been used as human shields by the GSPC.⁶

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The legal basis for conscription into the regular armed forces remained the National Service Code. Algerian men were liable for 18 months' compulsory conscription between the ages of 19 and 30, and an additional six months' service as a reservist up to the age of 50. Some 375,000 young men were estimated as reaching military service age annually.⁷ Evading conscription was punishable by a five-year prison sentence in accordance with Article 254 of the Algerian Military Justice Code.⁸

The minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces or paramilitary forces was unclear.⁹

Armed groups

Paramilitaries and militias

As part of its National Reconciliation initiative the government began dismantling government-allied paramilitary groups and local militias. In May 2004 the Algerian government endorsed the demobilizing of half the 300,000 members of the Legitimate Defence Force (GLD), the self-defence militias established in 1997 under Executive Decree.¹⁰

Armed opposition groups

In May 2007 the purported leader of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb released a recorded statement urging the youth of Algeria to join "the growing rank of martyrs".¹¹ It was not known whether armed groups recruited or used under-18s.

Developments

In October 2005 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed serious concern over the alleged cases of persons under 18 years of age being used by government-allied paramilitary forces and armed political groups, and over deficiencies in the birth registration system for children belonging to nomadic minorities. The Committee expressed deep concern over the situation of Western Saharan children living in refugee camps in Algeria.¹²

A bill on child protection (Code de protection de l'enfant) was introduced and was expected to harmonize existing laws pertaining to the protection and promotion of child rights.¹³

1 "Algeria", *Amnesty International Report 2007*.

2 "Algeria violence death toll jumps in September – reports", Reuters, 1 October 2007.

3 "Algeria", above note 1.

- 4 "Al Qaeda: profile in north Africa", BBC News, 11 December 2007; "Violence ahead of Algeria polls", BBC News, 14 May 2007.
- 5 "Echoes of past as Algeria probes Iraq bomb link", Reuters, 25 April 2007.
- 6 US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Algeria, 6 March 2007, <http://www.state.gov>.
- 7 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "Algeria", *World Factbook 2007*, www.cia.gov.
- 8 UK Home Office, Border and Immigration Agency, Country of Origin Information Report, Algeria, 2 November 2007, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>.
- 9 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of report submitted by Algeria, Concluding observations, UN Doc. CRC/C/15/Add.269, 12 October 2005.
- 10 Hugh Roberts, *Demilitarizing Algeria*, Carnegie Paper No. 86, Carnegie Endowment, May 2007, www.carnegieendowment.org.
- 11 "Algeria bombing video released", Al Jazeera, 8 May 2007, <http://english.aljazeera.net>.
- 12 Concluding observations, above note 9.
- 13 Ibid.