**Note of discussion between Amnesty activists and Nassera Dutour, Founder and Spokesperson**

**Collective of the Families of the Disappeared of Algeria**

**London, 5 July 2012**

This is a summary of points made by Nassera Dutour, founder and spokesperson of the Association of Families of the Disappeared of Algeria (CFDA), in a discussion with Amnesty activists on 5th July 2012 following a demonstration outside the Algerian embassy to mark the 50th anniversary of the independence of Algeria, and the continuing refusal of the Algerian authorities to investigate enforced disappearances and to bring those responsible to justice.

A few items have been re-ordered under headings for the issues we covered, rather than listed in the order that they came up. Background detail is added in brackets.

**Campaigning in Algeria**

* The approach of associations of families of the disappeared (CFDA among them) to campaigning in Algeria depends on following specific events.
* For example, in recent legislative elections, all candidates were asked by CFDA to give their views on the issue of enforced disappearances in Algeria. This wasn’t successful – no political party expressed any position on the unresolved issue of the disappeared.
* In September, CFDA will consider arranging demonstrations to follow up on its approach to political parties.
* A seminar on transitional justice is also planned.
* Every Wednesday, a demonstration by the families of people who disappeared takes place in Algiers.
* This used to be outside the offices of the government’s official human rights commission, but this was stopped (a couple of years ago), and the demonstrations have moved to a nearby square. Demonstrators are regularly harassed, but they feel they are getting their message over.

**State of public opinion in Algeria on issue of the disappeared**

* A lot of people don’t believe that the disappearances took place at the hands of the security forces, they believe (the official line) that Islamists were responsible.
* Algeria has a very young population, so memories can be short.
* The public is becoming more, not less, aware of the issue of enforced disappearances, as a result of the continued campaigning of CFDA and other NGOs and the continuing demonstrations by the families of the disappeared.

**Working with other human rights groups**

* CFDA works with other NGOs, including LADDH (Algerian League for Human Rights) and (since early 2006) through the Coalition of Associations of Victims of the Conflict of the 1990s, including CFDA, its sister organisation in Algiers SOS Disparu(e)s, Euromed ( Euro-Mediterannean Human Rights Network) and Djazairouna ( an organisation concerned with the moral, social and fiscal rights of the victims of terrorist violence, based in Blida- this is an area situated at the heart of what was known as the “Triangle of death” during the civil war of the 1990s).
* Nassera remains president of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network.

**Events in Algeria since the Arab Spring**

* There were demonstrations all over Algeria in early 2011, but they tended to be focused on particular issues, especially housing and corruption.
* (Apart from the police response and prohibitions of demonstrations), there was obviously a sense of fear after the 1990s about what could happen again.
* It is not possible to say whether or not there may be an Arab Spring in Algeria. It just can’t be predicted. Lack of internet connectivity on mobiles (and thus to Facebook, Twitter etc.) in Algeria compared to Tunisia and Egypt, played a major role in inhibiting an Algerian “Arab Spring”.

**Women’s rights**

* Women are often not concerned with political issues.
* CFDA recently approached a number of NGOs to work with them on issues relating to violence against women, but there was no response (other organisations were asked to sign a joint letter, but none of them would, possibly reflecting cultural difficulties in cooperation between groups in the region).
* The new association law may have a negative impact on women’s organisations.

**Freedom of expression**

* Campaigning on the freedom of expression of NGOs focused on Algerian disappearances could be very useful.
* Absence of freedom of expression is possibly one of the reasons why the Arab Spring didn’t take off in Algeria.
* The new law on associations is a major bar to free expression.

**Campaigning on Algerian enforced disappearances in the UK**

* All types of campaign are useful. Anything that activists in the UK can do is helpful.
* Nassera thought lobbying our MPs to get the UK to ratify the UN convention on Enforced Disappearances was very important.
* Nassera remembered the campaign to raise money for computers for CFDA. She said that CFDA could not have got started without support from Amnesty.
* CFDA would like to get training in social media – Nassera asked whether we could think of anyone who would be prepared to donate time and skills to help improve CFDA’s understanding of use of social media for campaigning**.** Nassera re-emphasized this once again when she was accompanied to the train to return home.