|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Amnesty International.jpg** | **Djamel Fahassi Disappeared 6 May 1995.jpg** |

© For use in printed AI internal and

campaigning materials

**Enforced disappearance of Djamel Fahassi:**

**update on the campaign for truth and justice**

**July 2011**

**Objectives of the campaign**

In the face of 15 years’ official silence on the fate and whereabouts of Djamel Fahassi, in common with approximately 8,000 people who disappeared in Algeria during the 1990s, the aims of this campaign include:

* Reminding the Algerian government regularly that his case has not been forgotten.
* Demanding a full, independent and thorough inquiry into his disappearance, and the prosecution of those responsible.
* Demanding the repeal of the laws enacted after the internal conflict ended in 1998, in particular the Charter on Peace and Reconciliation of 2006, that give impunity to state agents and opposition armed groups for human rights abuses during those years, including enforced disappearances.
* Urging the Algerian government to allow families of the disappeared, and human rights defenders, to exercise their right to peaceful free expression.

A summary of the aims of the campaign can also be found in AI UK’s Individuals at Risk case file.

Recent editions of the regular newsletter (ezine) from the North Africa team of AI UK country co-ordinators have featured actions based on these and similar themes. If you haven’t received it, the most recent ezine, for July 2011, can be downloaded at <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_21660.pdf> (paste in this link or send a mail asking for the ezine).

In connection with these objectives, there are other campaigning themes that we could adopt, for example covering:

* Ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. Algeria has signed but has not ratified the Convention.
* Visit to Algeria by from the United Nations’ Special Rapporteur on Enforced Disappearances to visit Algeria. The Algerian government has so far refused to agree to extend an invitation.
* Legal registration of associations of families of the disappeared. The Algerian government continues to insist that the issue of enforced disappearances has now been laid to rest, while seeking to repress activists, through refusing to register (and hence make legal) the associations of families of the disappeared.
* Lobbying European MPs and the EU Commission in advance of regular annual minister-level between Algeria and the EU, under the 2002 EU-Algeria Association Agreement .
* Letters to the Algerian government in support of the Alternative Charter for Truth, Peace and Justice, launched by Algerian human rights groups in Geneva in June.

There are still a large number of campaign postcards from the print run done by AIUK. Successful street actions have been held in Cardiff, Kingston and Croydon to talk to the public and resulting in hundreds of cards being signed and sent off. The Cardiff Group has had large placards professionally produced, that are very effective for attracting attention to the case. A street event focused on the Djamel Fahassi case is easy to organise, and full support is promised!

**If you are interested in taking up any of these campaign themes, in developing letters on these themes, or have your own suggestions, please get in touch and we can work on this together.**

**Perspectives on the campaign**

The Algerian government appears to be pursuing a policy of attempting to eliminate the memory of the disappeared as an abuse of human rights that still needs to be addressed. An essential aim of the campaign for Djamel Fahassi, and for other people who disappeared, is therefore to help to keep the memory alive, so that truth and justice can emerge when political circumstances allow. In most cases around the world of enforced disappearances accompanied by impunity for the perpetrators, it takes some years for the truth to emerge and trials to start. If we succeed in “carrying the torch” for just a few of those years, we will have made a big contribution to this cause.

Helping to encourage the relatives of the disappeared to keep up their campaign, and insisting on their right to freedom of expression, is equally important. To that end, Safia Fahassi has been featured by AI UK in the annual Greetings Card Campaign in the past two years.

Note that the campaign on behalf of Djamel Fahassi and other people who disappeared in Algeria is not a campaign aimed at securing their release from possible secret detention. If and when there is a change in Algerian politics that brings impunity to an end, and investigations take place – the Arab Spring demonstrates how quickly such an apparently distant goal can be realised – it is sadly not expected that the people who disappeared will emerge from jail.

**Update on the campaign**

We hear news that is relevant for the campaign for Djamel Fahassi from two sources: from his wife Safia, and from the associations of families of the disappeared.

Safia Fahassi, who lives in Algiers, is an English teacher. She has a 15-year old daughter, Myriam, who was four months old when her father disappeared. Safia is in touch with the Algeria campaign and research staff at the International Secretariat (Samira Bouslama and Diana Eltahawy). Samira spoke on the phone to Safia in June. Safia confirmed that she continues to campaign actively for her husband and for others who disappeared, and that she is not under pressure from the authorities despite the large number of campaign postcards that are being sent to the Algerian government. She asked us to continue our campaigning.

Soon after, Safia wrote to Naomi Brightmore of the Cardiff Group, who have campaigned for 10 years for Djamel Fahassi:

I'm so pleased to hear from you and know that your family and you are doing very well. I'm fine too despite what is happening around in the Arab world and in Algeria..... Myriam is doing well, she succeeded in her middle school exam and next year she'll start the secondary school, we celebrated her success two days ago where many of my friends and her joined us at home. I spoke to Samira last week and I thanked her for all the campaign AI is dealing with for my husband and I wish also I can thank the hundreds of people who sent me postcard to tell me that they are praying for me.

With respect to news from associations of families of the disappeared, the best organised and most communicative is the CFDA in Paris (Collective of Families of the Disappeared of Algeria, or Collectif des familles de disparus en Algérie). The founder and president of CFDA is Nassera Dutour, the mother of Amine Amrouche, who was 21 when he disappeared in Algiers in January 1997. The CFDA publishes regular press releases on developments with respect to disappearances in Algeria, in particular, appeals to the authorities, criticisms of official statements, and reports on demonstrations by (and harassment of) relatives of the disappeared. The CFDA’s website is at [www.algerie-disparus.org](http://www.algerie-disparus.org) , and you can sign up on this website to receive their releases.

We do not hear anything from the Algerian government, either as acknowledgement of letters and petitions sent, or as updates on individual cases. With the exception of one single case that is known to Amnesty, the Algerian government have never said a word to relatives of the disappeared about individual cases, except to offer them a deal (prescribed by the 2006 Charter) - under which the state offers a small pension and a death certificate for the disappeared person, in return for the relatives signing a form that “confirms” that the disappeared person was killed in the course of carrying out terrorist activities.

***A short update on the human rights situation in Algeria in general, since the start of the Arab Spring, is on page 5 below.***

**Actions within Amnesty UK on Djamel Fahassi and enforced disappearances in Algeria**

Local groups have worked hard on Algerian disappearance cases since these were first taken up in the 1990s by Amnesty. Initially, Amnesty pursued a large number of these cases, but in 2008-2009, a decision was made to reduce the number of such cases. The reason for this was that responses from families were rare, and Amnesty decided that it should only campaign on those cases where the family gave their explicit consent. This ensured that families were prepared for any adverse consequences, for example, official pressure, that could arise from campaign actions. It also ensured that there would be no further campaigning in cases where the families concerned had decided to reach a settlement with the authorities, and could therefore be unwilling to join, or be uncomfortable with, an Amnesty campaign on their family’s behalf.

Since 2009 Amnesty has focused its campaigning on 8 Algerian enforced disappearance cases (roughly one in a thousand of the actual cases). This illustrates the importance of treating each case both as an individual instance of injustice that needs to be addressed, and as representative of a much bigger problem.

In light of the continued commitment of the Cardiff Group, Amnesty International UK included Safia Fahassi in the Greetings Card Campaign in 2009 and 2010, and selected Djamel Fahassi’s case as a priority individual at risk case last year and this year.

Local groups working on the Djamel Fahassi case now include Cardiff, Colwyn Bay (which has also decided to adopt Amine Amrouche’s case), Hexham, Kingston on Thames, Romsey, Southend, Stafford, and Wells.

In the past 12 months, there have been approximately 30 actions at group meetings, conferences, street events, libraries, cinemas and Amnesteas centred on the Djamel Fahassi campaign. Over 2,000 campaign postcards have been distributed and probably the majority signed and sent to Algeria.

Outside the UK, groups in France, Germany and the Netherlands are supporting others among the Amnesty Algerian enforced disappearance cases. So our work is essential to keeping the campaign for Djamel Fahassi going.

Thank you for all the hard work!

*Hugh Sandeman, Algeria co-ordinator, AIUK / July 2011*

[*hs@sandemans.com*](mailto:hs@sandemans.com)

*020 8949 1763*

*07785 502 759*

**Update on the human rights situation in Algeria**

**since the Arab Spring: July 2011**

**The Algerian authorities and civil society have reacted cautiously to the Arab Spring.** Three of Algeria’s neighbours have been affected: Morocco’s king has introduced a degree of liberalisation, Tunisia ejected the dictator Ben Ali In January and is preparing for elections to a constitutional convention later in the year, and conflict continues in Libya.

In February, the day before Mubarak fell from power in Egypt, some (not all) opposition parties and certain civil society groups (including associations of families of the disappeared) sought to organise a major popular demonstration in Algiers. Demonstrations are not allowed in the capital, and the authorities tried to prevent people from assembling. On 12 February, 3,000 demonstrators did succeed in reaching the centre of Algiers, confronted by an estimated 30,000 police. **Subsequent attempts to mobilise large gatherings did not succeed.**

However, the authorities were sufficiently concerned to announce in early February that **the state of emergency in force since 1992 would be lifted**. This was done at the end of February. The government then started a round of consultations with opposition parties and certain civil society figures, but no specific initiative towards political change has resulted so far. However, the government did say that it would abolish the crime of sedition, as a move toward increasing freedom of the press.

**No mention has been made by the authorities of any intention to revise the impunity laws, and it is recognised by observers that it would probably take a change of regime to achieve this.** The Arab Spring, and the minor changes that have resulted in Algeria since then, have not been reflected in any shift in policy towards associations of families of the disappeared. The **associations came under sustained attack from August 2010**, when their weekly vigils in central Algiers began to be broken up by police. The official Algerian human rights commission (CCNPPDH), which does seek to secure greater freedom for the exercise of human rights in certain areas (e.g. sedition laws, rights of women, domestic violence, limits to police detention powers), continues to take a hard line with respect to the outstanding issue of enforced disappearances. The president of the commission, Farouk Ksentini, insists that the issue of disappearances has been resolved, and claims that the associations of the families of the disappeared are subject to manipulation by foreign interests.

The **UN Special Rapporteur** on Violence Against Women was able to visit Algeria in November 2010, and made observations, among other issues, on government restrictions on civil society. The UN Rapporteur on freedom of expression was able to visit Algeria in April 2011, and met with a group of families of the disappeared. His full report is due early next year.

Despite official pressure, there are **several associations of families of the disappeared** (in Algiers, Constantine, and Jijel). There is a national league of human rights, and a number of courageous lawyers and journalists who speak out for human rights. The Algerian section of Amnesty took part in a conference in Cairo in late June, attended by Amnesty’s Secretary General Shalil Shetty, on building human rights capabilities in the region.

In June 2011, the CFDA (Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria) combined with other human rights groups to launch a **campaign for an Alternative Charter for Truth, Justice and Peace**. The purpose of the campaign is to ensure that the dialogue about political reform in Algeria includes the objective of repealing the country’s impunity laws, contained in the government’s 2006 Charter for Peace and Reconciliation. The campaign was launched in Geneva in a number of meetings with UN Special Rapporteurs.