

@CHAPTER = ALGERIA

The human rights situation in Algeria improved significantly in 1989 in the aftermath of the bloody riots of October 1988 in which, according to Algerian authorities, 176 people died. Independent sources put the death toll at between 500 and 1000, with many more injured. Since the riots, substantial political reforms have been proposed and some important legislation has been adopted. Many reforms have yet to be implemented, however, with the result that basic rights have yet to obtain a sound legal footing.

The Bush administration has made no public effort to encourage Algiers to implement reforms. Yet a combination of factors makes this a particularly favorable time for Washington to exert such pressure. The Algerian government is facing a severe economic crisis and is looking for foreign investment, including U.S. capital. In an indication of the severity of the crisis, the government has abandoned its socialist stance and is now anxious to do business with Western countries. Similarly, Algeria for the first time has turned to the International Monetary Fund. As a result, Algeria wants more than ever to improve relations with the United States.

In the past, Algeria and the United States have found themselves at odds in the international political arena, due in large part to Algeria's perceived pro-Soviet stance, its rhetoric of anti-imperialism and non-alignment, and its advocacy of a new international economic order. In addition, the U.S. friendship with Morocco, Algeria's rival in the region, seemed for a long time to preclude any warmth between Washington and Algiers.

On a few occasions the Algerian government moved to improve its relations with the United States -- most notably by playing an important role during the Iranian hostage crisis -- but it was disappointed by the lack of U.S. response. The U.S. could have used the interest in improved relations represented by these overtures as an opportunity to raise human rights concerns, but it let the moment pass.

In more recent years, Algeria's desire for closer ties with the United States has been met by a U.S. recognition of its important political and strategic role. The U.S. has responded, for fiscal year 1990, with the sale of over \$20 million of military equipment, and the provision of \$150,000 for military training. Although still modest, especially when compared with the amounts given to Tunisia and Morocco, this military assistance represents a significant increase in U.S.-Algerian military cooperation.

George Bush, while vice president, visited Algeria and established personal contacts with President Chadli Bendjedid. These contacts were not, however, then used to promote human rights. For example, in October 1988, State Department spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley denounced the riots but did not condemn the repression. She said: "We don't believe violence is the appropriate way to achieve political change in any country. And we continue our close cooperation with officials from the government of Algeria."

Substantial human rights problems remain in Algeria that warrant U.S. attention:

@BULLET = Pledges by President Chadli and other senior officials to punish all those responsible for torture and killings during the riots have not been fulfilled. More than a year after the event, there have been no prosecutions and no disciplinary measures against those responsible for these abuses.

@BULLET = The media remains largely controlled by the government and freedom of expression remains limited.

@BULLET = Although new political parties have been authorized to exist alongside the official National Liberation Front ("FLN"), restrictions on political activity remain. The government and the National Assembly are still

entirely composed of FLN members, many of whom oppose reforms. And the new law governing political parties imposes serious financial constraints on new parties, limiting the financial resources of the latter while leaving the FLN largely unrestricted. As a result, new parties do not have the means to enter into fair competition with the ruling party, and members of the FLN still control all official business. Free elections in which all political parties would participate have not taken place.

@BULLET = In contradiction of the new Constitution, the Family Code of 1984 is still in force, legislating vast inequities between men and women. Under the code, an Algerian woman, whatever her age, is always under the "tutelage" of a male member of her family.

@BULLET = And Algerians of Berber origin, who constitute a large part of the population, are still denied the right to learn their own language and use it in publications and the media.

Public attention to these problems by the administration, at a time of considerable Algerian eagerness to improve ties with the United States and the West, could lead to a significant improvement in the Algerian human rights situation. We urge the Bush administration to take advantage of this opportunity to improve Algerian rights practices.