According to the annual report of the U.S. Library of Congress on arms sales to developing countries, released in August, the Middle East remained the largest arms market, accounting for more than 45 percent of all developing country purchases. In the 1998-2001 period, the U.S. was the source for more than 70 percent of all Middle East country purchases, and arms transfer agreements with Middle Eastern countries accounted for more than 79 percent of all U.S. arms sales to developing countries. The leading purchasers for this four-year period were the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia.

**ALGERIA**

**HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS**

Political violence declined overall but continued to claim an average of 125 lives monthly, most of them civilians. Frequent protests in the Berber-majority Kabylie region, not all of them peaceful, led to arrests and, at times, harsh repression by the security forces. Demonstrations and riots erupted frequently in other regions, in protest of poor living conditions, repression, corruption, and the impunity enjoyed by security forces, officials, and those with influence. Between March and April, some fifty prisoners died in a series of uprisings and fires set by inmates of several prisons protesting against harsh conditions and the jailing of pre-trial defendants for long periods rather than releasing them on bail.

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the U.S., Algeria, in its first report to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee, welcomed the new global efforts as “corroborating its own consistently argued position on the nature of terrorism...” Algeria, the report stated, had “long suffered the ravages of terrorism, often in the face of indifference” from the international community.

As in previous years, officials claimed that Algeria’s armed groups were on their last legs. Army chief-of-staff General Mohamed Lamari told the London-based el-Mawsahid as-Siyassi in June that the number of armed Islamists nationwide had dropped to seven hundred and that “the end of these criminal groups is imminent.” Authorities refused, however, to end the ten-year-old state of emergency that granted the Interior Ministry special powers to forbid public gatherings and detain individuals without charge.

While security in the major cities had improved, rebel groups that had spurned President Bouteflika’s 1999 offer of amnesty continued to massacre civilians in rural areas and smaller cities. These groups were also believed responsible for placing deadly bombs in public places. The province of Chlef was particularly hard-hit, with at least 120 persons slain between July and October, including twenty-six in an August 16 attack and twenty-one on October 24, both in isolated villages. A bomb blast in a busy market in Larbâa killed thirty-eight persons on July 5. The perpetrators of such attacks rarely, if ever, provided specific claims of responsibility or justifications for their acts. Active groups included the Armed Islamic Group, which had for several years been indiscriminately targeting civilians, and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, which was better known for attacks on military targets.

There was a noticeable decline in reports of human rights violations committed by the security forces compared to the mid-1990s. But the pattern of violations suggested that any decline was caused more by the drop in political violence than by stronger safeguards against abuse. While there were no new confirmed “disappearance” cases, police wearing plainclothes continued to arrest young men and hold them incommunicado beyond the legal twelve-day limit and without informing their families. While reports of torture were down in absolute numbers, prisoners were still at high risk of being tortured by their interrogators.

Impunity remained a paramount concern. President Bouteflika pledged more than once to bring to justice the security force members accused of using excessive force in putting down Berber protests in 2001, which left more than ninety dead. The president kept his promise to withdraw some of the controversial gendarme units stationed in the Kabylie, but little was done to bring offenders to justice. Similarly, despite pledges by a new presidential human rights commission to resolve the issue of the “disappeared” by the end of 2002, no progress had been achieved as of mid-November.

The Berber protest movement focused on demands for recognition of cultural and linguistic rights, and an end to repressive and corrupt behavior by the security forces. On the question of regional political autonomy the movement housed diverse viewpoints.

In elections held May 30, the National Liberation Front, the ruling party during Algeria’s three decades of one-party rule, captured 199 out of the 389 seats in the lower house of parliament. Three legal Islamist parties won a total of eighty-two seats, although the Interior Ministry had disqualified tens of their candidates on the grounds that they belonged to an “illegal organization,” namely the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). (Authorities banned the FIS in 1992 after it performed strongly in two years earlier, saying it was too close to the FIS.

During the campaign period, authorities prevented two Berber-dominated political parties that favored an election boycott from holding rallies and meetings in public venues, explaining that these were reserved for the parties competing in the vote. State-controlled television also denied coverage to the pro-boycott movement, but it covered the range of participating parties and candidates.

In parts of the Kabylie, the vote was marred by acts of intimidation, vandalism, and disruption committed by activists associated with the pro-boycott Coordination Inter-Wilaya, a collective of local Berber activist groups and councils in several provinces. However, the turnout was extremely low even in those parts of the Kabylie where no disruptions were reported, and reached only two percent for the region as a whole.
In local elections held October 10, the National Liberation Front, together with its ally the Democratic National Rally, won control of a majority of town councils and provincial assemblies. Again, pro-boycott activists in the Kabylie tried to dissuade voters through acts of intimidation and violence.

In a March 12 speech to the nation, President Bouteflika addressed some Berber grievances without responding to others. He decreed that Tamazight, the Berber tongue, would become a “national” language, a concession that fell short of the demand that it become an “official” language, like Arabic. The president also announced that twenty-four gendarme agents and five officers had been charged with homicide or improper use of their firearms for their conduct during the Kabylie unrest. “The trials will take place in complete openness,” he declared, “without any ambiguities or aspects left untreated . . . . The state will not yield to impunity.” However, in the months following this strong statement, it was possible to verify only two or three cases where security force agents had been bought to trial. These included the October 29 conviction by a military court of gendarme Merabet Mestari. Merabet was sentenced to two years in prison for involuntary homicide in the killing of student Massinissa Guermah, the incident that triggered months of protests in the Kabylie in 2001. In isolated instances, gendarmes, police, and members of government-organized civilian defense patrols were prosecuted for human rights abuses; however, the feared Military Security agency continued to operate with impunity.

Both the unrest and the repression in the Kabylie sharpened during March, despite the president’s speech. There were frequent sit-ins, marches, clashes, and acts of vandalism against public property. Residents complained of “retaliatory” and “punitive” raids by security personnel, who ransacked and looted homes, cars, and businesses, and punched and clubbed passersby in the street. Seven youths died wounded by live and rubber bullets, teargas, and beatings. Authorities arrested some three hundred people during March, including demonstrators and the leaders of the protest movement. Many were quickly tried and sentenced to up to two years in prison on charges such as participating in an illegal gathering, damaging public property, incitement to riot, blocking traffic, and distributing subversive tracts. The arrests and trials sparked further sit-ins and rallies to demand their release. These continued sporadically in the region until President Bouteflika on August 5 amnestied all those who had been arrested in connection with the protests in the Kabylie up until that point. However, both the protests and the arrest of demonstrators and their accused leaders continued after August.

On March 14, police in Algiers forcibly blocked a march called by the Berber-based Socialist Forces Front, turning back cars with out-of-town license plates and briefly arresting scores of marchers. Nine months earlier, authorities had banned all demonstrations in the capital “until further notice.” However, in other parts of the country, political demonstrations often took place without incident, such as an April 20 march by some one hundred thousand in Tizi-Ouzou.

On April 2, an uprising in a prison near Constantine resulted in the death of some twenty inmates in unclear circumstances. Throughout April and early May, prisoners staged disturbances and set fires in several facilities across the country. Nearly fifty were killed, including about twenty in an April 30 mutiny in Serkadji prison. Among the leading grievances expressed were the courts’ preference to detain suspects pending trial and the often-lengthy pre-trial detention that resulted. Mohand Issad, who headed a presidential commission on judicial reform, blamed the disturbances also on prison conditions, including “overcrowding . . . unacceptable food and disastrous medical conditions.” In press interviews in May, he asked, “When detainees are piled on top of one another in small cells, when juveniles are next to adult criminals and healthy persons next to sick ones, what should you expect?” President Bouteflika said on October 30 that authorities had “heard” the prisoners’ “cries of distress.” He promised improvements in prison conditions and urged judges to respect the “exceptional” character of pre-trial detention in Algerian law.

There was no progress in elucidating the fate of the estimated seven to ten thousand persons who “disappeared” between 1993 and 1998 at the hands of the security forces and their paramilitary allies. On October 28, Major General Mohamed Touati, a presidential advisor, called “disappearances” an “unfortunate and prickly issue that must be addressed by the governing institutions,” marking the first time a senior officer of the army had publicly acknowledged the problem.

The president’s National Consultative Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, founded in 2001, told Human Rights Watch on November 6 that it had 4,743 dossiers submitted by families regarding persons presumably “disappeared” by state agents, and that it continued to receive previously unreported cases. Commission President Moustapha Farouk Ksentini said he believed the real total of “disappearances” was “7,000 to 10,000, possibly even 12,000.” In a June 28 interview with the online journal Algeria Interface, Ksentini said, “The question of ‘disappearances’ must be definitively resolved before the end of the year . . . . If we reach the conclusion that the State is guilty, we will say so clearly . . . . The truth must become known, whatever it may be. The honor of the country and its institutions are at stake. The horrible things from the last few years must never be repeated.”

Ksentini acknowledged to Human Rights Watch on November 6, however, that neither the government nor his own commission had thus far satisfactorily elucidated a single case of “disappearance.” Nevertheless, authorities continued to make unsubstantiated claims during the year that the government was “clarifying” cases that families had brought to its attention. On March 10, Justice Minister Ahmed Ouyahia said on Algerian radio that some six hundred “disappeared” had in fact joined terrorist groups, out of a total number that he put at 3,200 to 3,300. He did not elaborate.

While there were no new confirmed cases of persons abducted and “disappeared” in 2002, security forces continued to make arrests in a manner that violated Algerian law and that put the detainee at risk of “disappearing.” The arresting force often wore plain clothes and declined to identify itself. The detainee was then often held in garde à vue detention beyond the twelve-day legal limit that applies to “terrorism” and “subversion” cases, although flagrant violations of this law were less frequent than in the mid-1990s. During garde à vue, relatives were unable to obtain
any official information about the person’s whereabouts. For example, ex-prisoner Omar Toumi of Algiers went on an errand on January 26 and failed to return to his family. His family contacted the police but received no official confirmation he had been detained until mid-February. Toumi was eventually brought to court and charged with security offenses. Omar’s brother Said has been “disappeared” since being arrested in 1994 at his workplace by armed men, some of them in uniform.

Persons taken into detention, whether for security or common criminal offenses, were at risk of being tortured by their interrogators. Beatings and the “chiffon”—placing a rag soaked in dirty water or household chemicals over the nose and mouth to induce choking—were the most commonly reported torture methods. The use of electric shocks was also reported on occasion in different detention centers. Ahmed Ouali and his father Mohamed and uncle Fouad were all arrested on January 12 near their homes in el-Harrach and brought to a detention center run by the Military Security agency. The three later told defense lawyer Mah-
by the time this report went to press. In September, Smaïn’s passport and driver’s license, confiscated in 2001, were returned to him. Repeated efforts by Human Rights Watch while in Relizane in November to obtain comment from Fergane were unsuccessful.

Organizations built around relatives of “disappeared” persons continued to collect previously unreported cases from 1993 to 1998. They held regular sit-ins in Algiers, Oran, Relizane, and Constantine to demand the return of their relatives or information about their fates. These were tolerated on some occasions and forcibly dispersed on others. On March 18, police dispersed relatives of the “disappeared” who were attempting to gather in front of the United Nations office in Algiers and arrested Abderrahmane Khelil, an activist with the LADDH and SOS-Disparus, an advocacy group launched by relatives of the “disappeared.” He was released without charge after a few hours. Police also used force to break up sit-ins by relatives of the “disappeared” before the headquarters of the president’s human rights commission on June 23 and July 3, and to turn back a march of some fifty relatives toward the president’s office on November 6.

Khelil and a friend, Sid Ahmed Mourad, were arrested on May 19 near an Algiers university campus where they had gone on behalf of the LADDH to investigate the arrest of students the day before. They were jailed until May 26, when a court gave them a six-month suspended sentence for “inciting an unarmed demonstration,” even though they had not arrived at the scene of the demonstration in question until the following day.

Foreign human rights organizations continued to receive visas selectively and sporadically. Between February 2001 and August 2002, no request to conduct missions from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Federation of Human Rights, or Reporters without Borders was approved. However, the organizations were able, on occasion, to send researchers and trial observers when they needed no entry visa due to their nationalities. In September 2002, both Human Rights Watch and Reporters without Borders received entry visas for the first time since May 2000 and January 2001, respectively, and both organizations carried out research missions in October.

Algeria continued its refusal to grant long-standing mission requests from the U.N. special rapporteurs on torture and on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, and did not accept a request for an invitation from the Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. However, it allowed a visit in September by the rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) continued its program of visiting inmates in prisons administered by the Justice Ministry, and opened an office in the capital. The organization was permitted also to visit prisoners in garde à vue detention in police stations. However, detainees held in facilities run by the military—where the most severe abuses were thought to take place—remained off-limits.

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**THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

**European Union**

The government of Algeria made progress in rehabilitating its image internationally in late 2001 and in 2002. An overall drop in political violence, President Bouteflika’s offer of partial amnesty to the rebels, and his strong anti-terror position following the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States helped to upstage human rights concerns that had kept many Western governments from deepening relations with Algiers.

The president met with President Bush twice during 2001. On November 30 of that year, he hosted Jacques Chirac in the first visit by a French head of state since 1988. One month later he was in Brussels for the initialing of an Association Agreement with the European Union.

Europe remained the chief source of Algeria’s imports and the main consumer of its exports, mostly natural gas and oil. France was the state most influential in shaping E.U. policy toward Algeria. It was also the leading source of Algeria’s imports and home to the largest Algerian community outside Algeria.

The E.U.-Algeria Association Agreement was formally signed on April 22, after four years of mostly stalled negotiations. It focused on tariff reductions, but also included an article that called “respect for human rights” an “essential element” of the agreement; this article was common to the E.U.’s agreements with its Euro-Mediterranean partners. The Algeria pact won the European Parliament’s endorsement on October 10, but before taking effect it had still to be approved by the national parliaments of Algeria and the E.U. member states.

The E.U. was quieter on human rights issues than in 2001, when the outbreak of unrest in the Kabylie prompted a more vocal response. The E.U.’s constituent bodies made no comment on the legislative elections held on May 30. But on June 5, on the occasion of the first of the twice-yearly meetings between Algerian officials and the E.U. “troika,” Spanish Foreign Minister Josep Pique, the delegation head, said the troika had noted a “clear improvement” in respect for democracy and human rights. He provided no specifics.

Pique added that the delegation had raised the issue of “disappearances,” but he did not disclose whether headway was made on the issue. Officials of the European Commission told Human Rights Watch that the troika had requested, at each bilateral meeting since 1999, concrete information on a regularly updated list of some thirty “disappearance” cases, but, as of October 2002, had yet to receive from Algerian authorities verifiable information on the whereabouts or status of any of those cases.

The Algeria Strategy Paper under the Euro-Med Partnership for 2002-2006 identified “consolidation of the rule of law and good governance” as one focus of E.U. assistance. In January, the European Commission signed a contract to disburse €8.2 million over six years for police reform, and also provided aid to a variety of nongovernmental organizations and independent media. However, the E.U.’s program hit a rough spot in January 2002, when Algerian authorities denied visas to two commission officials who were about to conduct a technical mission to Algeria.
to assess potential partners within civil society. Algeria, which stated that it had not been duly consulted in advance of the mission, subsequently issued visas and the mission took place in April.

When giving its assent to the Association Agreement, the European Parliament overwhelmingly adopted a strong ancillary resolution identifying “points of reference for assessing compliance with the human rights clause” of the pact. These goals included resolving the problem of the “disappeared,” “ending all forms of impunity,” “guarantee[ing] a truly independent justice system,” and allowing access for U.N. rapporteurs and human rights organizations.

United States

The U.S. and Algeria drew closer during 2001 and 2002, a result of increased cooperation in fighting terrorism, growing bilateral trade, and U.S. private investment in Algeria, mostly in the hydrocarbon sector.

While U.S. direct aid to Algeria remained minimal, the two countries engaged in a fourth round of joint naval exercises in January and several senior U.S. officials traveled to Algeria following President Bouteflika’s two meetings with President Bush in 2001. In December of that year, Undersecretary of State William J. Burns met with President Bouteflika; a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) delegation came in February to discuss security cooperation. Despite these opportunities, U.S. officials did not publicly raise human rights concerns. Criticism, when it came, was mild. Burns, speaking in Washington on January 30, cautioned all the Maghreb countries about “heavy-handed governance that aims to suppress dissent, but often has the effect of prolonging it.” State Department spokesman Richard Boucher commented on May 30, “We have seen progress in Algeria toward greater democracy, and we urge President Bouteflika and his government to continue efforts to improve and strengthen freedom of expression, responsive government, and a transparent political process.”

But the tenor of relations during 2002 was revealed more by the Department of State’s counter-terrorism chief Francis X. Taylor, who declared upon his arrival in Algiers on June 27, “Algeria is one of the most tenacious and faithful partners of the United States . . . . Algeria has cooperated with us in every domain.” Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman visited Algiers on November 6 and said in a press conference that the U.S. was supporting Algeria’s fight against terrorism “with some joint training and also with other help that we can provide.” Grossman met that day with Prime Minister Ali Benflis and Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem. There was no public indication that he raised human rights issues in those discussions; however, in his press conference Grossman said the U.S. was prepared to help train Algerian judges so that they would be “independent . . . courageous . . . [and] make decisions on the basis of the law.”

The only forceful public comment made by the U.S. on the subject of human rights in Algeria remained the annual country reports on human rights practices, released in March. The U.S. Agency for International Development funded some training programs for human rights and other civil society organizations. The State Department’s Democracy Commission Small Grants Program awarded $18,000 to three human rights groups to organize a conference on the “disappeared.” The National Endowment for Democracy, a congressionally funded private foundation, also provided grants to independent human rights groups.

On March 27, the State Department added the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat to its list of foreign terrorist organizations, a designation it had already given to the Armed Islamic Group.

The U.S.-government-run Export-Import Bank, which provided loans and guarantees to assist U.S. investment abroad, had an exposure in Algeria on September 30 of U.S. $1.84 billion, second in the region only to the bank’s exposure in Saudi Arabia of $1.88 billion.

The U.S. shifted its policy in favor of licensing private sales of night-vision equipment for counter-insurgency use by the Algerian government, according to various press reports published since late 2001. The equipment had been among the nonlethal materiel the U.S. had previously declined to license because of concerns about the human rights practices of the government. The State Department declined to comment when Human Rights Watch sought confirmation of this reported change in policy.