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Algeria: The Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (Mouvement pour l'autodétermination de la Kabylie, MAK), including its activities and the treatment of MAK members by the authorities and Islamists; treatment of Berbers by the authorities and Islamists (2013-August 2017)

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Algeria: The Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (Mouvement pour l'autodétermination de la Kabylie, MAK), including its activities and the treatment of MAK members by the authorities and Islamists; treatment of Berbers by the authorities and Islamists (2013-August 2017)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (Mouvement pour l'autodétermination de la Kabylie, MAK)

According to sources, the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia (Mouvement pour l'autonomie de la Kabylie) became the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (Mouvement pour l'autodétermination de la Kabylie, MAK) on 4 October 2013 (Berberes.com 19 June 2015; Kabyle Universel 19 May 2016). For information on the Movement for the Autonomy of Kabylia, consult Response to Information Request DZA104327 of August 2013.

In the [translation] "Frequently Asked Questions" section of its website [1], MAK is described as

[translation] "a rallying of dynamic forces in Kabylia who want to advocate in favour of the Kabyle people's right to self-determination" (Makabylie.org N.d.a). It is specified that MAK is not a political party, but "an organization that transcends all political divides." Its one and only objective is the realization of the Kabyle people's right to build a democratic, social and secular state by asserting its right to selfdetermination" (Makabylie.org N.d.b).

According to that same section of the MAK website, the Kabyle provisional government (Gouvernement provisoire Kabyle, GPK) is a means of internationalizing the Kabyle situation (Makabylie.org N.d.c). For information on the GPK, consult section 3 of Response to Information Request DZA104327 of August 2013. According to an undated page on the MAK website, the GPK president is Ferhat Mehenni and its prime minister is Lhacène Ziani (Makabylie.org N.d.d). Algérie Focus, an Algerian online newspaper, states that in June 2017, Mehenni was the only leader of the MAK and the GPK (Algérie Focus 28 June 2017).

On its website, MAK explains its [translation] "Project for a Kabyle government" (Makabylie.org 26 Feb. 2016). To reach its goals, according to its advocates, the MAK aims to:

[translation]

Bring the Kabyle situation before international institutions through diplomatic action of the GPK, to fight for the right of the Kabyle people seeking selfdetermination.

Foster civil disobedience and reject all elections in Kabylia until a referendum is organized for the self-determination of Kabylia.

Consult the population by petition and referendum vote.

Implement institutions for Kabyle citizens to compensate for the Algerian institutions rejected in Kabylia.

Promote cultural self-affirmation by having Kabyle taught in schools, colleges and universities in Kabylia.

Use Kabyle in public places (signage, fronts of public buildings, etc.). (Makabylie.org N.d.e)

MAK activities mentioned in the sources consulted by the Research Directorate include the following:

- Commemorative marches for events tied to the Kabyle cause—1980 Berber Spring (*El Watan* 22 Apr. 2017), repression of 2001 (*El Watan* 16 June 2017; *La Liberté* 15 June 2017; *Le Mag* 16 June 2017);
- Marches to celebrate International Mother Language Day (*El Watan* 21 Feb. 2017; Kdirect.info 22 Feb. 2017) or the Berber New Year (TSA Algérie 12 Jan. 2017; *El Watan* 14 Jan. 2017);
- Commemorative meetings (US 3 Mar. 2017, 19; *El Watan* 20 Apr. 2017);
- Election boycotting (*Jeune Afrique* 27 Apr. 2017; Anavad 4 May 2017).

2. Treatment of MAK Members by the Authorities

The Algerian daily *El Watan* indicates the following in a January 2017 article:

[translation]

The other fact to remember is the repression faced by both the leaders and the activists and the foundation of the movement [...]. The MAK is the main concern of the security services in Kabylia [...]. Activists, despite while advocating peacefully, are systematically arrested and taken to the police station. (*El Watan* 12 Jan. 2017)

In a June 2017 article, the same source states that [translation] "MAK activists are often subjected to interrogations, and its demonstrations are suppressed by security forces" (*El Watan* 28 June 2017). The

MAK website has a section titled [translation] "Intimidation Alerts," where "intimidations against sympathizers, activists and leaders of MAK" are recorded by individual and by date (Makabylie.org N.d.f). It contains a list of nine individuals who have been arrested, detained, summoned, interrogated, searched or had their passport taken by the authorities, all during the period from March 2013 to July 2016 (Makabylie.org N.d.f). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016 of the United States Department of State reports that in February 2016, the President of MAK told the Algerian daily *El Watan* that about 100 MAK activists had been briefly arrested in Tizi Ouzou to prevent their attendance at a MAK national meeting (US 3 Mar. 2017, 19). According to the same source, in June 2016 in Larbaa Nath Irathen, the authorities arrested "several" MAK activists who were preparing to hold an unauthorized meeting (US 3 Mar. 2017, 19). *Country Reports 2016* states that, according to press reports, clashes ensued during demonstrations to demand the release of these activists, and some demonstrators and police were injured (US 3 Mar. 2017, 19).

In 2017, sources report the following arrests and incidents of violence:

- In January 2017, during a march organized in Béjaïa by MAK to celebrate the Berber New Year, dozens of protesters were arrested and then released, although the march was not prohibited from being held (Le Matin d'Algérie 12 Jan. 2017; TSA Algérie 12 Jan. 2017; *El Watan* 14 Jan. 2017).
- On 21 February 2017, during a MAK rally in M'chedellah for International Mother Language Day, MAK activists were questioned by security forces (*El Watan* 21 Feb. 2017; Kdirect.info 22 Feb. 2017).
- On 20 May 2017, during a march in Bouira, MAK activists were brutalized and arrested by law enforcement (*El Watan* 20 May 2017; *L'Express* 7 June 2017).
- On 14 June 2017, a commemorative march of Kabyle activists in Azazga was blocked by law enforcement (CMA 15 June 2017; *El Watan* 16 June 2017). According to sources, this march had been organized by the MAK (*El Watan* 16 June 2017; *La Liberté* 15 June 2017). Some activists were arrested (*El Watan* 16 June 2017; Le Mag 16 June 2017). According to a summary translated by BBC of an article in *La Liberté*, an Algerian newspaper, several MAK activists were among them (*La Liberté* in BBC 17 June 2017).

Sources add that on 26 July 2017, the websites of MAK and its news agency Siwel were blocked (Siwel 26 July 2017; Maghreb Émergent 29 July 2017). According to the Siwel website, the authorities ordered the public telecommunications company Algérie Télécom to block nine sites associated with MAK (Siwel N.d.). Information indicating whether the sites are still inaccessible from Algeria could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources report that Algerian authorities have repeatedly prohibited meetings in a literary café in Aokas, in Béjaïa, because of alleged ties to MAK (Siwel 21 July 2017; Algérie Patriotique 24 July 2017; Algérie Focus 27 July 2017). According to Algérie Focus, the government authorized a meeting planned for 29 July 2017, after [translation] "[a] citizen's collective" replaced a cultural collective as the organizer, "after misleading claims were made by the authorities about the MAK 'membership' of organizers of this literary café" (Algérie Focus 27 July 2017).

3. Treatment of Berbers by the Authorities

For general information on the Berbers in Algeria, consult Response to Information Request DZA104327 of August 2013.

According to *Country Reports 2015*, the Berber population participates freely and actively in the political process and represents more than one-third of government officials (US 13 Apr. 2016, 26). The American research and analysis institute Jamestown Foundation reports in May 2014 that the Berber people are well integrated in the social, political and economic structure of the country (Jamestown Foundation 2 May

2014).

In 2016, the Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI), a publication that results from the collaboration of almost 300 experts in top academic institutions around the world and local reporters (BTI N.d.), estimates that "[s]ignificant improvements have occurred over the last decade in the recognition of the rights of the Berber populations in terms of language and education" (BTI 2016, 12). According to the BTI, "[c]ontinued reforms such as the introduction of Berber into the education system have reduced tensions for the Berber populations, notably in Kabylie" (BTI 2016, 31). A number of sources report that Tamazight [the language of the Berber population] became an official language in Algeria in February 2016 (Amnesty International 22 Feb. 2017; Freedom House 12 July 2017). According to Le Matin d'Algérie, an information site, *Tamazight* is also known as *Amazigh* and *Taqbaylit* (Le Matin d'Algérie 23 Mar. 2017).

The BTI notes however that the Berber populations claim discrimination in terms of limited access to education in their mother tongue or in French (BTI 2016, 22). That same source states that Berber populations "do not seem to suffer discrimination in the workplace" (BTI 2016, 22). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that in August 2016, the president of the Amazigh World Congress (Congrès mondial amazigh, CMA), an [translation] "international NGO that defends and promotes the individual and collective rights of the Berbers" (CMA N.d.), was summoned and interrogated for two hours by the Algerian police about its activities and reports of violations of human rights in Kabylia (CMA 22 Aug. 2016) in a letter sent to the UN Secretary General (Siwel 9 Aug. 2016).

3.1 Violence in Ghardaia

Sources report violent intercommunal clashes between Berbers (Mozabites) and Arabs (Malékites) in Ghardaia since 2013 (International Crisis Group 21 Nov. 2016, 10; Jamestown Foundation 6 Feb. 2014). According to the International Crisis Group, [International Crisis Group English version] "[s]ince 2013, local flare-ups between Mozabites and Arabs have been quick to ignite and nearly impossible to extinguish" (International Crisis Group 21 Nov. 2016, 10). Regarding the 2013 clashes, that same source states that the Berbers [International Crisis Group English version] "say they face structural discrimination in Arabisation policies as well as attacks on their homes, religious symbols and businesses by Arab Maliki groups" (International Crisis Group 21 Nov. 2016, 9). According to *Country Reports 2014*, 13 died and several hundred were injured during the months of violent clashes in Ghardaia in 2014 (US 25 June 2015, 32). That same source adds that the security forces failed to respond adequately to this violence (US 25 June 2015, 32). Similarly, the BTI reports that "the state has been criticized for its handling of the 2014 riots" and that "[t]he security services' apparent bias against the Ibadite youths has reinforced ethnic cleavages and a sense of injustice for them at the hands of the state" (BTI 2016, 31). International Crisis Group reports that [International Crisis Group English version] "Mozabites [...] filmed and distributed videos of police sheltering Arab protesters, proof, they say, of authorities' bias" (International Crisis Group 21 Nov. 2016, 11). *Country Reports 2014* reports also that, according to independent media, "the inability or unwillingness of security forces to prevent further violence [...] exacerbated the conflict" (US 25 June 2015, 33). According to International Crisis Group, [International Crisis Group English version] "[v]iolence crested in 2015" with "dozens on both sides" "killed and hundreds wounded" in July 2015 (International Crisis Group 21 Nov. 2016, 11).

Other sources report that, following their arrest during the clashes in Ghardaia in July 2015, dozens of pro-autonomy activists remain detained, including activist and defender of human rights Kamel-Eddine Fekhar (HRW 25 Aug. 2015; CMA 15 Jan. 2017). In a joint declaration, on 29 May 2017, Human Rights Watch, EuroMed Rights, [EuroMed Rights English version] "a network of more than 80 human rights organisations, institutions and individuals based in 30 countries in the Euro-Mediterranean [region]" (EuroMed Rights N.d.), Amnesty International and Front Line Defenders, an organization that advocates on behalf of human rights defenders and collaborates with a number of international organizations (Front

Line Defenders N.d.), requested that the Algerian authorities drop all charges against Fekhar and 40 other individuals, described as peaceful activists in favour of the rights of the Berber minority, who were in pretrial detention (Human Rights Watch et al. 29 May 2017). Information indicating whether the activists had been released could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Treatment of MAK and Berbers by Islamists

Scarce information on the treatment of MAK members or Berbers by Islamists could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Articles from various newspapers state that on 3 August 2013, some Kabyles ate in public in Tizi Ouzou during Ramadan to assert their freedom of conscience and denounce the imposition of fasting (*Le Monde* 4 Aug. 2013; *L'Humanité* 5 Aug. 2013; *Slate Afrique* 6 Aug. 2013). According to sources, this action was initiated by MAK (*Slate Afrique* 6 Aug. 2013), or MAK participated in its organization (*Le Monde* 8 Aug. 2013). According to sources, the [translation] "former co-leader" of the Islamic Salvation Front (Front islamique du salut, (FIS), an Islamist political party founded in 1989 and dismantled in 1992 (PHW 2015), stated in a video recording that this action should be subject to the death penalty (RFI 7 Aug. 2013; *Le Monde* 8 Aug. 2013).

In June 2017, the French weekly *L'Express* reports, with respect to Algeria:

[translation]

Every year, during the fasting, heated confrontations and arrests take place across the country. This occurs in Kabylia, in particular, where everyone who frees themselves from the religious practice (the non-fasters) faces repression by the government, which relays the fundamentalists' demands in order to buy their peace. (*L'Express* 10 June 2017)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The [translation] "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the MAK website includes the following warning: "The responses given below are not official. [...] No item may be considered as internal MAK text or a part of its project. The responses provided were not decided by the presidents, national council or movement congress. This page was produced by activists, whom we thank" (Makabylie.org, N.d.a).

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