

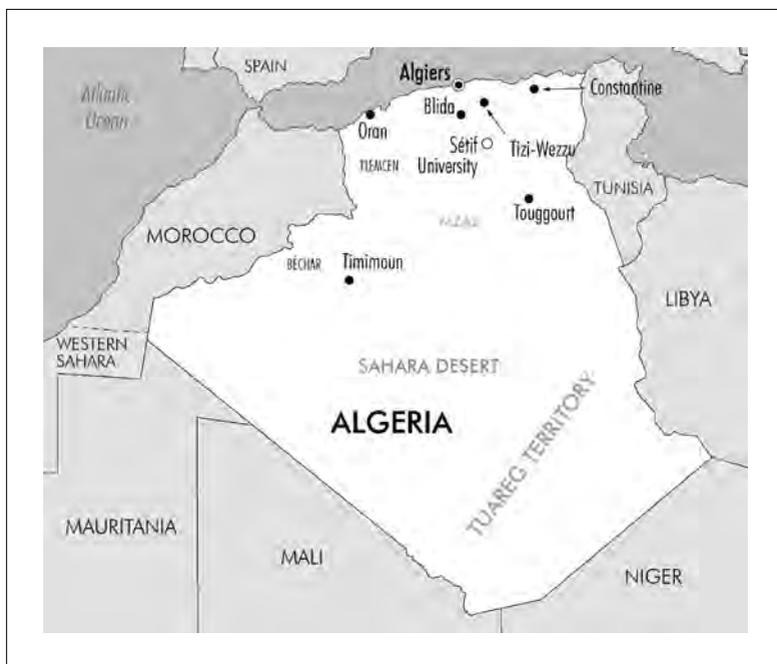
## ALGERIA

The Amazigh, the Mozabite and the Tuareg are the indigenous peoples of Algeria, as well as of other countries of North Africa and the Sahara, and have been present in these territories since ancient times. They can primarily be distinguished from other inhabitants by their language (Tamazight), but also by their way of life and their culture (clothes, food, beliefs). The Algerian government, however, does not recognise their indigenous status, wherefore no official statistics on their demographics exist. Associations defending and promoting the Amazigh culture estimate the Tamazight-speaking population at around 11 million people, or 1/3 of Algeria's total population.

The Amazigh of Algeria are concentrated in five large regions in the north-east, the east, the west, the South-west and the south of the country.<sup>1</sup> Large cities such as Algiers, Blida, Oran, Constantine, etc., are home to several hundred thousand people who are historically and culturally Amazigh, but who have been partly arabised over the course of the years, succumbing to a gradual process of acculturation.

After decades of demands and popular struggles, the Amazigh language was finally recognised as a "national language" in the Constitution in 2002. Despite this achievement, the Amazigh identity continues to be marginalised and folklorised by state institutions, and Arabic remains the country's only official language. There has to date been no law ensuring the protection and promotion of Amazigh political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic rights in Algeria. Consequently, state resources remain entirely directed at promoting the Arabo-Islamic identity of Algeria, while the Amazigh identity remains concealed or relegated to an inferior position.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, anti-Amazigh laws remain in place, and new ones have been enacted.<sup>3</sup>

Internationally, Algeria has ratified the main international standards, and it voted in favour of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. However, these remain un-implemented, which has led to the UN treaty monitoring bodies making numerous observations and recommendations to Algeria in this regard.



### Deteriorating socio-economic conditions

**T**he Amazigh in Algeria are unable to benefit from the natural resources found on their lands and territories (water, forests, oil and gas). In the Sahara, the Mozabite and Tuareg peoples receive none of the benefits of the energy resources that lie in their subsoil, and the water found in the Kabylie mountains and in Chenoua benefits cities such as Algiers first and foremost, with no compensation provided to the local population. Consequently, Amazigh living in rural and mountainous areas survive on remittances sent home by family members abroad. The unemployment rate in these areas is three times the national average. Young people, in particular, seek an escape in the form of alcohol and drugs, exile and suicide.<sup>4</sup>

On the pretext of the war on Islamist terrorists, the Algerian government has sent military reinforcements in particular to the Kabylie region. This region now

has the greatest concentration of armed forces in Algeria but also suffers from the highest levels of insecurity (murders, armed robberies, kidnappings). Ransom demands are now very common but there are no official statistics in this regard because the Algerian authorities keep all matters of security highly confidential.

### **Police violence and judicial harassment**

2014 was marked by police violence in the Kabylie and M'zab regions. In Kabylia, the April 2014 presidential elections were widely boycotted and peaceful demonstrations were organised in many areas of the region to denounce the undemocratic nature of these elections. During one of these demonstrations, in Haizer, Tuvirett Wilaya (Province) in Bouira, the police violently intervened to arrest 32 demonstrators who were subsequently sentenced to between two months and two years in prison. On 20 April, the anniversary of the "Arab Spring", a peaceful march of in Tizi-Wezzu was violently set upon by police who later brutally beat up the demonstrators they arrested.

Members of the Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylie (*Mouvement pour l'Autodétermination de la Kabylie / MAK*), an unrecognised political movement, are systematically placed under surveillance, persecuted by the police force and harassed by Algeria's judicial system. Members of MAK were thus subjected to police violence and summoned to court in May in Vgayet, Tuvirett and Sidi-Aich; July in Tazmalt; and August in Tizi-Wezzu.

As in 2013, the region of M'zab was shaken throughout 2014 by serious clashes between the indigenous Mozabite population and Arab Chaambas settled unlawfully by the Algerian authorities on the Mozabites' traditional territories. According to the Algerian press, the riots resulted in the deaths of some 15 youths and the ransacking of thousands of houses, shops and farm sheds belonging primarily to the Mozabite population.<sup>5</sup> According to civil society organisations, the Algerian Human Rights League in particular, the Algerian authorities have stirred up the conflict by deliberately discriminating against the indigenous inhabitants. An activist was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of 100,000 dinars in September 2014 for filming police officers looting a shop in Guerrara, Ghardaia Wilaya.

Although the state of emergency was lifted in February 2014, restrictions on freedom remain. All associational activity requires the authorisation of the admin-

istration and the police. Consequently, associations independent of the Algerian government no longer dare organise their activities.

The law on associations, adopted in December 2011,<sup>6</sup> is beginning to have an effect in terms of restricting Amazigh freedoms, particularly the requirement to communicate solely in Arabic and to respect Sharia law, and the ban on any relationship with Amazigh associations abroad or foreign NGOs. ○

## Notes and references

- 1 Namely in Kabylia in the north-east, Aurès in the east, Chenoua, a mountainous region on the Mediterranean coast to the west of Algiers, M'zab in the south, and Tuareg territory in the Sahara. A large number of Amazigh populations also exist in the south-west of the country (Tlemcen and Béchar) and in the south (Touggourt, Adrar, Timimou), accounting for several thousands of individuals.
- 2 The few initiatives taken in the area of communication and teaching suffer from a severe lack of resources and a large number of obstacles are placed in the path of their implementation.
- 3 Law on the generalisation of the Arabic language, Law on associations and political parties, which stipulates exclusive use of the Arabic language, Family Code based on Sharia law, etc...).
- 4 See for example: <http://www.tamurt.info/l-alcool-et-la-drogue-detruisent-la-structure-sociologique-de-la-kabylie,4612.html>
- 5 Mohamed Chaouchi. Algérie. Violences intercommunautaires à Ghardaïa: quels enjeux? <http://www.diploweb.com/Algerie-Violences.html>
- 6 Law No 12-06 of 12 January 2012 on associations, Official Journal of 15/01/2012.

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