Algeria’s Disappeared Remain Unaccounted For, While Authorities Target Those Demanding Truth and Justice

Joint Statements · Algeria · 30 August 2026

Joint statement issued by SHOAA for Human Rights and HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement

On the occasion of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, observed on 30 August, HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement and Shoaa for Human Rights stress that Algeria’s enforced disappearances cannot be treated as a closed chapter belonging to the 1990s. More than three decades later, families continue to seek the truth about what happened to their loved ones, while those demanding truth and accountability face growing restrictions on their work. Enforced disappearances, today, remain a major human rights and accountability issue: families continue to demand truth, justice and reparation, those responsible have largely escaped accountability, and human rights defenders and organizations documenting these cases and advocating for truth to be revealed continue to face mounting repression.

The authorities’ closure of the SOS Disparus office in March 2026 is a clear example of how enforced disappearances remain a current issue. On 16 March, Algerian authorities ordered the closure of the organization’s office in Algiers. Affiliated with the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA), SOS Disparus has for years provided a space for families to organize, speak publicly about the fate of their loved ones, and demand truth, justice and reparation. HuMENA has documented the closure as part of a wider pattern of restrictions affecting the organization, its activities and its leadership. The closure therefore cannot be treated as a routine administrative measure: it directly affects a key space where families have organized for years to demand answers and keep the issue of enforced disappearances in the public sphere, while significantly hindering the organization’s ability to document cases, support families and challenge impunity.

The disappeared

The disappearances in Algeria took place mainly during the country’s internal armed conflict in the 1990s, particularly between 1992 and 1998. During those years, Algerian security forces and their civilian allies arrested thousands of people who then disappeared. Human Rights Watch documented more than 7,000 cases involving people whose fate and whereabouts remained unknown after they were taken into custody. The victims included men and women who were reportedly taken from their homes, workplaces or the street by security forces and subsequently disappeared. In addition, these disappearances took place in the wider context of Algeria’s “Black

Decade", when armed Islamist groups also abducted and killed civilians, presenting two different violations that should not be conflated. In the cases of enforced disappearance, the concern is specifically with people who were deprived of their liberty by State agents, or by people acting with the State's authorization, support or acquiescence, and whose detention was then denied or whose fate or whereabouts were concealed.

International law defines enforced disappearance under Article 2 of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance as the arrest, detention or abduction of a person by State agents, or with the State's authorization, support or acquiescence, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the detention or concealment of the person's fate or whereabouts. Algeria signed the Convention on 6 February 2007 but has not ratified it which remains the case today. Nevertheless, Algeria remains bound by other international human rights obligations relevant to enforced disappearance, including under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as applicable customary international law.

The scale of the disappearances remains unclear. More than 30 years later, Algeria has still not published a complete, publicly verifiable list. According to the UN Committee against Torture, figures provided by the Algerian government for people who disappeared since the 1990s ranged from 4,000 to 7,000. Human Rights Watch reported that between 1992 and 1998, Algerian security forces and their civilian allies arrested and disappeared more than 7,000 people. It found that no security force agent accused of involvement had been charged or brought to trial, and that few, if any, families had received concrete, verifiable information about their relatives' fate. These figures are not a definitive count. However, what remains clear is that thousands of families are still waiting for answers*: what happened, who was responsible and accountable, and where are their loved ones?*

The right to truth

International human rights law recognizes the right of victims and their families to know the truth about serious violations, including the circumstances of an enforced disappearance and the fate and whereabouts of the disappeared. This right is closely linked to the State's duty to investigate and provide an effective remedy. For Algerian families, this means more than declaring a person presumed dead. In its concluding observations on Algeria, the UN Human Rights Committee has called on the authorities to guarantee families access to the truth, including by exhuming unmarked and mass graves and identifying remains through scientific means, including DNA testing, and has urged Algeria to recognize the right to truth in law. The same committee also called for thorough and independent investigations into all allegations of enforced disappearance. More than three decades later, the lack of a complete public account and effective investigations continues to leave families without answers.

Justice denied, reparation limited

The passage of time does not end the State's obligation to investigate enforced disappearances. In

its 2018 concluding observations, the UN Human Rights Committee called on Algeria to ensure that Article 45 of Ordinance No. 06-01 on the implementation of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation does not undermine victims' right to an effective remedy. Yet decades later, families have still been denied effective investigations and judicial remedies. In individual cases, the Committee found that Algerian authorities had failed (PDF)to investigate disappearances despite repeated requests from families. The Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation has also restricted access to remedies and contributed to impunity for serious human rights violations.

Algeria has provided financial compensation to families affected by the "national tragedy", but this has not replaced their right to truth and justice. Families of disappeared persons have been required to obtain a declaration of presumed death to access compensation, a requirement the UN Human Rights Committee has criticized for risking further victimization. Reparation must go beyond financial compensation to include truth and accountability, restitution where possible, compensation, rehabilitation, acknowledgement of the violations, recovery and return of remains, and guarantees of non-repetition. Without these measures, compensation alone cannot repair the harm suffered or provide the justice families have been demanding for decades.

Decades of waiting: families still demanding answers

For families of the disappeared, more than three decades have passed without closure. The absence of information, official answers and meaningful investigations has left many living with uncertainty and unable to properly grieve or move on. This suffering has also extended across generations, with children and relatives growing up without answers and, in some cases, taking up the search themselves. The right to truth is therefore not only about addressing what happened in the past, but also about recognizing the harm families continue to endure while the truth remains withheld.

Through the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA) and SOS Disparus, families have continued to come together, document cases, carry photographs of their disappeared relatives and speak publicly in support of truth, justice and reparation. Their continued efforts show that the issue has not been left in the past and that families are still demanding recognition of their rights and accountability for the violations they have endured.

The words of Faouzi Tellaa , son of Farid Tellaa reflect the weight of this decades-long struggle:

> "*For 28 years, I have been searching for the truth and for the fate of my father, Farid Talaâ. As a family, we have paid a heavy price for this struggle, but the years of absence and waiting have not weakened our determination to our right to truth and justice. We will continue to demand that his fate be revealed, no matter how long it takes, until we know what happened to him and justice is achieved.*"

Those Demanding Truth Face Restrictions

The restrictions facing families of the disappeared and those working alongside them show how the

issue continues to affect civic space in Algeria. Families seeking answers, human rights defenders, organizations and truth advocates documenting disappearances have faced arrests, prosecution, restrictions on movement and constraints on their activities.

Among the clearest examples is Nassera Dutour, President of the Collective of Families of the Disappeared in Algeria (CFDA) and SOS Disparus. Dutour lost her son, Amine Amrouche, in circumstances of enforced disappearance in 1997 and has since dedicated her work to defending the rights of families of the disappeared. On 30 July 2025, Algerian border police prevented her from entering Algeria upon her arrival at Algiers airport and forcibly returned her to France, where she resides.

According to a joint communication by UN Special Procedures, including the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Dutour was held for around three hours and questioned by police about her association's activities before being expelled to France. She had presented a valid Algerian passport, but the authorities gave no legal justification for refusing her entry, reportedly telling her only that she was "a member of an NGO." The UN experts raised concerns that the measure appeared directly linked to her legitimate human rights work.

The pressure intensified after the closure of SOS Dispars on 16 March, with authorities disrupting a weekly gathering of families of the disappeared on 8 April and arresting SOS Disparus coordinator Slimane Hamitouche, who was sentenced the following day to six months in prison for "inciting an unarmed gathering.

On 7 April, security services in Constantine arrested 66-year-old Samia Bekouche, the mother of activist Faouzi Tellaa, together with her son Hamza Tellaa, after searching their family home. Since 1998, the family has been seeking the truth about the fate of Farid Tellaa. During her detention, Samia Bekouche was pressured to contact her son Faouzi, who was outside Algeria, and ask him to withdraw from activities related to uncovering the truth about his father's disappearance. While Hamza was initially released, he was later arrested again and taken to court. Samia was released after several hours. SHOAA for Human Rights documented the arrests and the pressure placed on Samia Bekouche.

The following day, on 8 April, human rights activist Slimane Hamitouche was arrested after taking part in the weekly gathering of families of the disappeared in Algiers. Hamitouche is himself a relative of a disappeared person and has been searching since 1994 for his uncle, Achour Barkaoui, who raised him. On 9 April, the Sidi M'Hamed Court convicted him of "incitement to an unarmed gathering", without committal order, and sentenced him to six months' imprisonment without a committal order, while acquitting him of the charge of failure to comply.

Rachid Ben Nakhla, whose father Boukhatem Ben Nakhla has been missing since 1994, was arrested in April 2026 and placed in pre-trial detention after security services searched his family home. He was reportedly detained over Facebook posts in which he spoke about his father's disappearance and the violence in Relizane during the 1990s.

His case was among those raised by UN Special Procedures in a joint communication on 29 April 2026. The UN experts raised concerns over allegations of arbitrary and incommunicado detention, harassment and intimidation, and called on the Algerian authorities to disclose his fate and whereabouts and release him.

As of August 2026, his fate and whereabouts remain unknown, with no credible information confirming his release. The UN experts linked his case and those of other relatives of disappeared persons and members of CFDA and SOS Disparus to wider restrictions on their legitimate work for truth and justice. The Algerian government, however, denied that Ben Nakhla's prosecution was linked to his work on behalf of families of the disappeared.

Taken together, these cases show the different ways families, activists and organizations demanding truth are being targeted: a human rights defender is prevented from entering her own country; an organization working with families is closed; family members are arrested; an activist is prosecuted for taking part in a peaceful gathering; and the son of a disappeared person is detained for speaking publicly about his father's fate.

These restrictions go beyond the individuals directly affected. They make it harder to document and discuss Algeria's enforced disappearances, preserve the memory of those who disappeared and carry out human rights work. They also further narrow the space for civil society to continue demanding truth and accountability.

In light of this, HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement and SHOAA for Human Rights call on the Algerian authorities to:

- **Reveal the fate and whereabouts of all disappeared persons and inform their families; conduct effective, independent investigations, identify and prosecute those responsible, and guarantee truth, justice and full reparation, including access to official information, archives and the identification and return of remains where possible.**
- **End harassment, intimidation, arrests and prosecutions of families, human rights defenders and organizations seeking truth and justice; release those arbitrarily detained for peacefully exercising their rights and guarantee freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Ensure organizations working on disappearances can meet, document, support families, research and speak publicly without unlawful restrictions.**
- **Cooperate fully with UN experts and independent human rights mechanisms, including the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, by providing information needed to clarify unresolved cases, allowing access to families and organizations, and facilitating requested country visits; review laws that enable impunity, including the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, and ensure accountability and guarantees of non-recurrence.**
- **Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and align national law with its standards.**

In addition, we call on the United Nations and its relevant human rights mechanisms to follow up on Algeria’s implementation of their recommendations, including by pressing for investigations into unresolved disappearances, effective remedies for victims, and continued monitoring of the situation.

Published at https://humena.org/algeria-enforced-disappearances-truth-justice/
HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · info@humena.org