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Algeria: Amnesty International condemns Algiers bomb attacks

Amnesty International condemns in the strongest terms the bomb attacks which today rocked the Algerian capital, Algiers. At least 23 people died and over 160 were injured, according to a provisional set of figures announced by the Interior Ministry.

The first explosion occurred at the entrance to the headquarters of the Algerian government, in the centre of the city, reportedly killing at least 12. A second attack, reportedly leading to the deaths of at least 11, took place shortly afterwards near a police station in the eastern residential district of Bab Ezzouar, on the road to the international airport and not far from one of the capital's universities. According to witnesses, the attack involved three car bombs. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for any of the blasts.

The attacks, which appear to have been mainly targeted at civilians, are the first since the 1990s in which powerful explosives have targeted the centre of Algiers and caused a high number of casualties.

Amnesty International condemns all deliberate attacks against civilians. Such acts are absolutely prohibited under international law and can never be justified. They demonstrate an utter disregard for the most fundamental principles of humanity.

Background Information

Algeria has in recent years slowly been emerging from over a decade of violence in which as many as 200,000 people are thought to have been killed and many others injured. In 2006, fighting between armed groups and security forces claimed over 300 lives, including more than 70 civilians, a considerably lower death toll than that recorded during the height of the internal conflict during the mid-1990s.

However, recent weeks have seen an upsurge in violence, with increased armed confrontations reported between the security forces and the main Islamist armed group still active in the country. The group, formerly known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat, has reportedly changed its name to the al-Qa'ida Organization in the Islamic Maghreb, according to a statement posted in January 2007 on a website believed to be linked to the group. As yet, however, it is not known whether they or others were responsible for today's lethal attacks.

