



Activity Report for July 2005 – December 2006

May 2007

1. Introduction

This is Al Karama's second Activity Report. It covers the period from 1 July 2005 to 31 December 2006. The first report (in Arabic) covered 1 July 2004 – 30 June 2005.

The organisation has experienced increased development as a result of its judicial and media activities. For comparison, Al Karama has submitted 927 cases to UN special procedures between 1 July 2005 and 31 December 2006, whereas it had submitted 85 between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2005. Apart from routine activities, Al Karama has carried out thematic transversal projects.

The organisation's visibility has increased markedly in the Arab world, thanks to a variety of appearances on major Arab audiovisual media, as is attested by the numerous contacts by Arab citizens who have heard Al Karama speak on such media.

The organisation's presence at the level of UN bodies, notably the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has been reinforced due to the increasing number of communications addressed to the various special bodies and thanks to the contacts established with associates of the Office. Al Karama's relations with other human rights NGOs have also been reinforced by regular contacts and common action.

It is nonetheless necessary to stress that the organisation is still under construction, consolidating ongoing activities and launching new ones. Al Karama suffered in 2006 from the inadequacy of its human and financial resources to the increased number of projects fixed at the state of the year; some of these projects have not been completed. Moreover, and for the same reasons, the organisation has been unable to cover a certain number of Arab countries.

Section 2 of this report deals with organisational issues. Sections 3 and 4 present its judicial and media activities respectively. Section 5 is devoted to other types of activities, mainly thematic projects.

2. Organisation

Over the period covered by the present report, the administrative council has met seven times at the following dates and places:

- November 2005 in London
- February 2006 in Doha
- April 2006 in Geneva
- May 2006 in Beirut

- June 2006 in Geneva
- August 2006 in Geneva
- December 2006 in Istanbul

During the meeting of February 2006, a strategy document was adopted. This document defines the goal of the organisation more precisely, as follows: “to contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights in the Arab world.” To realise this goal, the following activities were adopted in the strategic document:

- (1) To provide information on human rights violations in the Arab world;
- (2) To provide moral and judicial assistance to the victims of these violations;
- (3) To pursue the perpetrators of these violations and fight impunity;
- (4) To encourage, and if need be pressure, governments to respect human rights;
- (5) To propagate a culture of human rights in Arab societies and make citizens aware of their constitutional rights and the means for protecting them;
- (6) To train human rights defenders;
- (7) To support every political, judicial and educational system tending to reinforce the protection of citizens against human rights violations.

Because of the organisation’s limited resources, it was decided that priority would be given to the following human rights violations: arbitrary detention, torture, extrajudicial execution, and forced disappearance.

The organisation’s experience has also led it to note a need in certain cases to cooperate with other UN mechanisms, among them the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, the Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders, and the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism.

The organisational structure has been changed. In addition to the judicial and media departments, a campaigns department and a department of study and training have been created. The period covered by the present report has also seen the opening of the London and Beirut offices, the nomination of a spokesman and the establishment of about forty active members in thirteen out of 22 Arab countries. These members play a fundamental role in the collection of information on violations of human rights in their respective countries.

3. Judicial activity

Over the period covered by the present report, a total of 927 individual cases of human rights violations have been submitted to various UN special human rights bodies. These cases fall into the classes shown in table 1.

In addition to communications with special bodies, correspondence about these cases has often been addressed to relevant Arab diplomatic missions at Geneva, and sometimes to lawyers and NGOs.

Links with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have been reinforced by permanent contacts and regular meetings with the civil servants

in charge of the various bodies. A meeting has taken place with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour.

The Organisation has provided moral and legal assistance to many people finding themselves in situations where their basic human rights have been violated in many countries (the US, the EEC, Lebanon, Mauritania, Algeria, etc.)

Finally, about fifty urgent appeals have been launched concerning specific cases. These appeals are not accounted for in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of individual cases submitted to the various UN special human rights bodies between 1 July 2005 and 31 December 2006

<i>Body</i>	<i>By country</i>	<i>Total</i>
Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances	Algeria: 674 Saudi Arabia: 1 Libya: 19 Qatar: 1	695
Working Group on Arbitrary Detention	Saudi Arabia: 24 Egypt: 153 United Arab Emirates: 3 United States: 2 Iraq: 1 Libya: 3 Morocco: 1 Mauritania: 18 Qatar: 8 Syria: 2	215
Special Rapporteur on Torture	Algeria: 2 Saudi Arabia: 4 Morocco: 1	7
Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions	Algeria: 1 Libya: 1	2
Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders	Saudi Arabia: 2	2
Independent Expert on Terrorism	Algeria: 1 Morocco: 1	1
Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression	Saudi Arabia: 3 Morocco: 1	4
Total		927

4. Media activity

A strategic document on media action has been drawn up. It sets four priorities: (1) presence in the audiovisual media and press of the Arab world and Europe; (2) establishing relations with journalists specialising in human rights; (3) developing the organisation's website; (4) setting up a mailing list for press releases.

Al Karama has sent out a number of press releases regarding individual cases of human rights violations or taking positions on specifying events such as, for example,

electoral fraud in the elections of a number of Arab countries, or the participation of certain Arab states in torture by proxy of victims secretly sent from Western countries.

Al Karama has regularly been present on many audiovisual media such as Al Jazeera, Al Alam, Al Hewan, BBC, along with many newspapers. The organisation's spokesperson has built up a network of journalists, particularly in the Arab world and in London.

5. Other activities

5.1. Human Rights Council

After the UN General Assembly announced the creation of the Human Rights Council (HRC) in March 2006, Al Karama welcomed the initiative, hoping that this new body would rise above the political obstacles suffered by the Human Rights Commission. The member states of the UN had until 9 May to announce their candidacy for the HRC. A number of Arab states with bad human rights reputations became candidates. Al Karama put together a detailed report on the main human rights violations committed in the following countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. On 19 June 2006, during the HRC's inauguration, Al Karama, along with many other Arab NGOs, organised a demonstration before the Palais des Nations at Geneva protesting against the nomination of Arab countries well known for their disrespect for human rights. Al Karama announced that it deplored the election of these states and that it feared that they would undermine the foundations of the HRC. The report was sent to the Secretariat of the HRC.

5.2. Commemoration of the Abu Sleim prison massacre in Libya

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Abu Sleim prison massacre in Libya in 1996, Al Karama organised a campaign in collaboration with Libyan human rights NGOs to remember this crime and demand an independent inquiry. This campaign consisted of a sit-in in front of the Palais des Nations.

5.3. Torture in Saudi Arabia

A campaign against arbitrary detention and torture in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was prepared for summer 2006. A document was drawn up in Arabic and English on this subject. The campaign aimed at raising consciousness of human rights violations in Saudi Arabia, and included demonstrations (sit-ins, handing out brochures, appearances by well-known personalities, etc.) in many European capitals.

5.4. Imprisonments and repression of the press in Egypt

Arbitrary detention is a serious problem in Egypt. Thousands of political opponents have been detained without a fair trial, in some cases for many years. Al Karama has given this dossier special attention. Many lawyers have been recruited in Egypt to collect precise and detailed information on the detainees. Al Karama has also concerned itself with the case of the women journalists hit, detained, and subjected to sexual harassment. Al Karama proposed the name of the Egyptian journalist Abeer Al-Askary to Canadian Journalists for Free Expression to be nominated for their international prize.

5.5. Disappearances in Algeria

During the 1990s, between 10,000 and 18,000 citizens were disappeared in Algeria. Al Karama has submitted 672 dossiers to the Working Group on Forced Disappearances. Al Karama has also recruited a person in Algeria to collect and verify data and follow up dossiers. This person is responsible for setting up a national database of the disappeared and cross-referencing the various files already established.

5.6. Political prisoners and prisoners of opinion in Mauritania

The Mauritanian authorities, under the pretext of the "War on Terror", have arrested and detained a large number of political opponents and Muslim ulema. On 14 September 2005, a judge ordered that they be freed, and on 6 April 2006 the Court of Appeals confirmed this order. Yet the Mauritanian authorities refused to submit to the rule of law. Al Karama took this dossier in hand and worked on many plans to get them freed. Notably, it launched a media campaign on its Internet site and through appearances on audiovisual media. It also appealed to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, in view of the inhuman conditions of their detention. Al Karama also got a number of human rights NGOs including Amnesty International involved in common actions on this issue. Finally, it appealed to various European Union bodies (Presidency, Parliament, Commission) to exert pressure on Mauritania, with whom an accord of cooperation was being prepared.

5.7 Moroccan prisoners of war detained by the POLISARIO in Algeria:

In July 2005 the Organisation acted as a mediator with the Polisario Front authorities to discuss the situation of the 404 Moroccan prisoners of war detained in Algeria.

Two meetings were organised with Polisario representatives and took place in Geneva in July 2005.

5.8. Algerian refugees in the United Kingdom

In July 2006, during a visit by the Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika to London, an extradition agreement was signed with the British government. On this occasion, Al Karama organised a campaign to raise awareness of the dangers Algerian opposition members would be subject to if extradited to Algeria. This campaign joined other NGOs', and a co-signed letter was sent to the British Prime Minister.

5.9. Yemen autopsy mission

Mr. Ahmed Ali Abdullah died on 10 June 2006 at the same time as two other detainees of Saudi nationality, Mr. Yassir Talal az-Zahrani and Mr. Mani' Shaman al-Utaybi. The American authorities have stated that these three detainees committed suicide. The three victims' bodies were autopsied inside the camp by a military medical team, and a few days later were repatriated and sent back to the authorities of their respective countries. Ahmed Ali Abdullah's family asked Al Karama to help them organise an autopsy of their son's body. The organisation

commissioned a medical team headed by Prof. Patrice Mangin, director of the University of Lausanne's Institute of Legal Medicine. The autopsy was performed on 21 June 2006 at the Sanaa Military Hospital in Yemen. After further toxicological analyses at Lausanne of some samples taken from the victim's body, a medico-legal report on the autopsy was provided to Al Karama.

5.10. The fight against impunity

One of the projects on hold for 2006 is to explore the possibilities offered in many European countries regarding the fight against impunity, and put together a guide. The first phase of this project has been realised. It consists of an introductory guide of the subject. The mechanisms for fighting impunity (the International Criminal Court, international criminal courts, universal jurisdiction) are described. The experiences of two NGOs fighting impunity (Justitia Universalis and Track Impunity Always – Trial) are discussed. Finally, the priority tasks for an NGO fighting impunity are presented.

5.11. Networking with other human rights NGOs and bodies

Al Karama has established cooperative relations with many human rights organisations, in Europe, such as Amnesty International's headquarters, Al local branches in many towns, Arab Human Rights Commission, Justitia Universalis, Algeria Watch, and in the Arab world, notably in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, and Morocco. Al Karama has also established contact with official bodies concerned with human rights at the European Union level and from many European countries. Al Karama was in fact invited to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom to speak about its activities.