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**BRIEFING PAPER
of the
MOVEMENT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION FOR KABYLIA**

A Brief History of Kabylia

Put in a perhaps imprecise but nevertheless evocative nutshell, the history of the Kabyle people is one of resisting colonizers. Whether such colonial efforts were by the Ottoman Turks, the Arabs, the French, or now the Algerians, many have sought to conquer and/or annex “la belle Kabylie” that is both Mediterranean and African.

The mountainous terrain of Kabylia covers about 50,000 square kilometers to the east of Algiers all the way north to the Mediterranean Sea. There are about 12 million Kabyles, about half of whom live in Kabylia and others who live in the diaspora, mostly in France and Canada. Many Kabyles live in exile, unable to return to their homeland because of decades of oppression, marginalization, and persecution by subsequent Algerian regimes.

Kabylia’s independence goes back to the dawn of time. Kabylia has been referenced by historians since antiquity. Herodotus mentioned the Cabales who inhabited the land, and Ammien Marcellin revealed the formidable federal organization of the Quinquégentiens who overlap present-day Kabylia.

As various invaders ravaged the North African subcontinent, Kabylia -- having remained unconquered -- proved itself to be a conqueror when it founded the Fatimid dynasty (909-1014), then again when it held the siege of Algiers against the Turks from 1520 to 1527. The Hammadites, whose capital, from 1091 to 1152, was the city of Vgayet (Bougie, now Béjaïa), signed numerous treaties with Mediterranean political entities, including with the Pope. The King of Koukou in Kabylia corresponded with the King of Spain.

Thus, as far back as one goes in time, Kabylia was independent. It wasn’t until its military defeat against the troops of Mac Mahon and General Randon in the battle of Icherriden in 1857, that it became “annexed” to French Algeria. Today, the rulers of now post-French Algeria try to pass off as “Algerian” those brave Kabyles who fought to their last breath not to become, nor to be, Algerians.

Kabylia played a central role in the conduct of the Algerian war to oust France in 1954-1962. The fact that it was essentially a war waged by Kabylia, poses a problem for the Algerian military who now treat the territory and its people as an enemy.

Indeed, according to Algeria, the present colonizer, there is no history of Kabylia, only that of Algeria, which was created by the French colonial army on October 14, 1839. Since 1962, for Algeria, there has been no Kabylia; it is merely one of its "regions" which participated, and nothing more, in the Algerian war. The word “Kabylie” has been deliberately erased from all official records by the Algerian regimes.

The Kabyles -- “A People”

The Kabyles are an indigenous ethnic group under the family of Amazigh (or Berber) people of North Africa, an ethnicity that spans across several countries in the North African part of the continent. The Kabyles are a “people” with a distinct identity within the meaning of the UN Charter and other international human rights instruments.

There are numerous indicia of this distinct identity. Language is probably one of the most obvious. Tamazight is a language encompassing multiple linguistic subgroups. Today the Amazigh language is,

itself, more a postulate than a reality. Tamazight is a kind of North African Latin that has disappeared, a theoretical mother tongue that gave birth to a whole family of languages as did the Slavic, Germanic, or the ancestor of the Turkic languages. The difference is that the Slavic, Latin, and Turkic offspring all emancipated themselves from their mothers by becoming adults, becoming major languages, but the Amazigh linguistic daughters of Tamazight, such as Kabyle, are being forbidden from reaching their maturity.

Once the French left Algeria in the early 1960s, the Kabyles were forbidden from speaking their language outside Kabylia. "Educators" forbade Kabyles from speaking Kabyle amongst themselves.

While the anti-Kabyle official Algerian party line from 1967 accepted the teaching of Hebrew, even as hatred of the Jew was a constant theme in Algeria, it did not allow the teaching of Kabyle. In fact, the Kabyles started to be described as "Jews," a derogatory term that has devolved more recently nowadays into "Zionists."

Unifying against the utter denial of their Amazigh language, the Kabyles began to organize, leading to the "Kabyle Spring of 1980." By 1994, a school boycott observed throughout the school year won back recognition of the Amazigh family of languages. Following the Kabyle citizen uprising of the Black Spring in 2001, "Amazigh" obtained the status of a "national," although not an "official" language.

But it was not until 2020, pressured by MAK and the Kingdom of Morocco's recognition of "Amazigh languages" in its Constitution with the status of "national and official" language in 2011, that Algeria finally paid lip service to Amazigh, reluctantly, but downgrading it as inferior to Arabic which was then given the status of the "state language."

Another indicator of the indigenous Kabyle identity is with respect to religion. Unlike Algeria, the Kabyles respect all beliefs, separate the divine from the temporal, meaning they are largely secular, and are distinguished by their remarkable tolerance in matters of religious belief. Present day Kabyles are Muslims, atheists, Christians, and still some Jews who practice Judaism secretly. But unlike in post-French Algeria, there is no one religion that is considered the only one or the right one.

Birth of the Movement for Self-Determination of Kabylia

MAK was born in Kabylia during the Black Spring of 2001 against a backdrop of decades of denial: denial of identity, denial of language, denial of basic civil and human rights, and indeed an attempted denial of existence. MAK was a movement of the Kabyle people to reclaim Kabylia, reassert their Kabyle identity, and seek a path -- initially -- toward autonomy.

When the effort of more than a decade at autonomy failed against continuing negation, subjugation, and overt condemnation, MAK graduated to a strategy to seek full self-determination.

Since then, MAK has engaged in a struggle, utilizing all peaceful, lawful, legal, and diplomatic means available, to move toward establishing an independent Kabylia.

Members of the movement created a provisional government in exile, a parliament, an advisory council, and a new Constitution.

Heightened Repression and Violations of Kabyle Civil and Human Rights

Algeria's reaction has been to step up its repression of Kabyles. It used the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext, in 2021 imposing even more stringent restrictions and cracking down on civil liberties in an effort to silence the Kabyles and quell the leaders of their movement. It implemented "Operation Zero Kabyle," which as its name suggests is a program to eradicate the Kabyle people. It designated MAK a "terrorist

organization,” a designation that the [US State Department](#) said in 2023 is more “political” semantics than reality.

The regime has since arrested dozens of journalists and hundreds of members of the MAK and others. Currently detained and subjected to sham “trials” are about 500 individuals, 38 of them who have been condemned to death. The regime denies the most basic freedoms, including freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. It has closed all 42 churches in Kabylia and routinely forces women prisoners to wear the hijab.

Algeria has so far enjoyed impunity in militarily occupying Kabylia, burning its inhabitants alive, arresting, torturing, and condemning, without proof, the many Kabyle political activists who have peacefully claimed the right to self-determination of Kabylia.

Yet despite its significant escalation of fascistic measures in the last few years to stamp out “Kabyleness,” post-French Algeria’s refusal to recognize a Kabyle people clashes with an all too stubborn reality. The Kabyles, who represent at least a quarter of the citizens of Algeria, have a strong identity as a people and refuse to blend into an Algerian “nation.” They are determined to remain a solid indigenous body. They have never agreed to give up their collective being, or what is the essence of their soul or what defines their existence.

The Algerian power knows this all too well. It conveniently forgets that it has called upon “brave Kabyles” to fight for the PLO (in 1967, 1973) or the Polisario (in 1975). It is exceedingly ironic, that the regime today calls upon the Kabyles to fight the MAK, their only representative against their autocratic oppressor.

Call for International Action

The advent of the MAK on the Kabylia scene put paid to all post-French Algeria's hopes of digesting the Kabyles into its chimeric nation. It signifies the resounding failure of Algeria’s policies of denial, assimilation, dehumanization, and/or eradication of Kabylia.

Every day MAK is drawing the World’s attention to the more than sixty years that post-French Algeria has not recognized Kabylia, nor built ties of respect or sincere cooperation to promote development and prosperity. Instead, it attacks Kabylia, preventing both the Kabyles and all the peoples it dominates from advancing and taking charge of their own development and building together their collective happiness.

Kabyles have refused to vote in illegitimate Algerian elections, and Kabylia is determined to no longer remain silent. Kabylia refuses to let a puppet state rob it of its voice and its right to decide its future or its ability to participate in building an environment of peace, freedom, prosperity, and security. Post-French Algeria cannot speak in Kabylia’s name nor on behalf of Kabyles. Kabylia refuses to let a criminal state burn its flora and fauna every summer, refuses to allow it to arrest, torture, and imprison Kabyles who yearn for justice, freedom, and democracy, and are in love with their land and proud of their language, heritage, and people.

On April 20, 2024, on the steps of the United Nations headquarters in New York, MAK announced the “rebirth of the Kabyle State” to take its rightful place among nations.

Kabylia is calling upon the UN and the international community, especially countries that base their existence and their civilization on freedom, human rights, and technological and social progress, to hear and respect the will of the Kabyle people to join the community of accomplished nations participating in the construction of a humane world.