



MEMBER PROFILE

# KABYLIA

Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia -  
Anavad



UNREPRESENTED  
NATIONS & PEOPLES  
ORGANIZATION  
unpo.org

*Last updated: July 2017*

**Status:** Occupied territory

**Population:** 10 million

**Areas:** 40,000 km<sup>2</sup>

**Language:** Kabyle, French, Algerian Arabic, literary Arabic

**Religion:** mainly secular

**Ethnic Groups:** Kabyle



### **UNPO REPRESENTATION: Movement for the Self-Determination of Kabylia (MAK)-Anavad**

The MAK-Anavad has been a member of UNPO since 2017.

### **OVERVIEW**

The Kabyle people is one of the several Berber (Amazigh) groups indigenous to North Africa, mainly present in Libya, Algeria and Morocco (smaller groups live in Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Tunisia, Burkina Faso and Egypt).

Kabylia, located in the north of Algeria, is home to more than ten million people (a third of the Algerian population). Kabyle people have a territory and their own language. Their identity and strong personality have been shaped and claimed for centuries through a language, a common history, a culture and a civilisation rooted in the large Amazigh family, giving them a collective consciousness, a unique socio-political organisation and an age-old and strong attachment to the values of democracy, freedom, secularism, solidarity and respect for others (Preamble of the Project for the Kabyle State).

### **UNPO MEMBER PERSPECTIVE**

The MAK-Anavad, the main political body representing Kabyle interests, and Kabyle people themselves reject the position taken by the government of Algeria to continue exercising authority over Kabylia, as this amounts to the unilateral annexation of the territory of Kabylia to the Peoples' Democratic Republic of Algeria.

The aim of the MAK-Anavad is to regain the independence it lost in 1857 when it was annexed to Algeria. For the past decade, the MAK-Anavad has tried to organise a peaceful resistance and has led the Kabyle people towards a growing factual independence.

Today, it wishes to be part of UNPO in order to meet the need for a strong and credible international platform to make its quest for self-determination be heard.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Before 1857, Kabylia, which defines itself as secular and of Amazigh (Berber) origin, was an independent territory governed by the Kabyle people. However, in 1857, after 18 years of coexistence as independent entities and despite the vigorous resistance by the local population, Kabylia was annexed to Algeria.

In 1926, the Kabyle people took the lead of the National Liberation Movement in the hope of recovering its freedom once Algeria has become independent from France. However, the Kabyle insurrection that followed Algeria's independence was considered as a secessionist attempt by the Algerian State and led to a two-year war (29 September 1963 - 16 June 1965). It resulted in the signing of a peace pact that was rather favourable to the Kabyles on 16 June 1965. However, the peace pact was revoked by the Boumediene coup d'Etat against Ben Bella three days later, on 19 June 1965.



On 20 April 1980, the Berber Spring, the rebellion of the Kabyle people against the Algerian power, started with civilians barricading themselves for over a month. The impact of this episode is still present today amongst all Amazigh peoples and 20 April has tacitly become the Berber People International Day.

Since the independence of Algeria in 1962, the power struggle between Kabylia and the Algerian State is ongoing. Kabylia has always arisen the anxiety and distrust of the government for fear that its claims infect other fringe groups of the population (source: Dimitri Dombret, "Analysis - Kabylie: Repression and a Plan for Autonomy", ESISC, 15 April 2010, 1.). In that context, the Algerian State has banned the Kabyle language, censored Kabyle singers, writers, poets, theatres and first names to smother Kabyles' identity and linguistic and cultural resistance. Its football team and the Kabyle Sportive Youth (JSK) have been banned in order to erase the name of Kabylia. Since 1980, 70 percent of social housing on Kabyle territory is granted to non-Kabyle people who are thereby encouraged

When tensions occur between the Algerian State and Kabylia, the former redoubles its efforts to depersonalise the Kabyle people through the Arabisation and islamisation of its policies. Since the end of the 1980s-early 1990s, Kabylia opposed democratic claims to the Algerian dictatorship by demanding the rehabilitation of the Berber identity, political and trade union pluralism and the promotion of human rights (source: *ibid*). Two riots, in 1986 and 2008, carried forward the claim for a multi-party system including Kabyle representatives, but resulted in the death of between 500 and 800 people. In 2013, the Director of the Centre d'Etudes Maghrebines en Algerie (which could be translated as "Centre for Maghreb studies in Algeria") noted that even though Berbers occupy or have occupied major posts within the government, those who demand the right to have their identity respected have difficulty finding a job or getting promoted within the public administration.<sup>1</sup>

In 1994, while an armed conflict raged between the political authorities and the Islamists, the Kabyle people organised its peaceful resistance by boycotting schools during the whole 1994-1995 academic year in order to request that the Amazigh language, Tamazigh, be taught. Indeed, the recognition of the Amazigh language as a national language in 2002 but not as an official language commits the Algerian State to promote it, but not to use it (source: *ibid*). According to some experts, the Amazigh language may disappear within the next 30 following years if no step is taken to preserve it.

During the summer of 1998, revolts followed the murder of popular Kabyle singer Matoub Lounes, killed by a group of armed men in circumstances that remain unclear. This event

<sup>1</sup> [IRB](#) - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada: Algeria: information on the Mouvement pour l'autonomie de la Kabylie (MAK), including its activities and the treatment of MAK members at the hands of the authorities and Islamists; treatment of Berbers by the authorities and Islamists (2009 - March 2013) [DZA104327.FEJ, 16 August 2013 (accessed 6 March 2017).





amplified the feeling of frustration, injustice and discrimination among the Kabyle people. However, it is during the Black Spring in April 2001 and for the three following years until April 2004, that the movement took breadth and structure in reaction to the murder of a young Kabyle student and the arbitrary arrest of three college students by gendarmes (source *ibid*). Algerian authorities used war weapons to repress Kabyle demonstrators who remained pacific and shouted: "You cannot kill us, we are already dead". Following this massacre of 127 people which injured thousands, more than 2 million Kabyle people marched on Algiers on 14 June 2001.

### **CURRENT ISSUES**

The Kabyle people, since the beginning of the two-year war for its independence in 1963, is suffering from a constant political repression

comprising censorship, persecution, discrimination, killings, violent repression and attempts to reduce or even suppress its cultural distinctiveness, whether it be its language or identity. Furthermore, the Algerian government denies them any kind of political existence and, despite its numerous peaceful acts of resistance and protests, does not enable the MAK-Anavad to set up official elections.

However, the MAK-Anavad held two Kabyle National Conventions in 2011 and 2014 to which all the political ideologies were represented. It was a prelude to the establishment of a Kabyle Parliament ("Consultative Council"), which will be set up before the end of 2018. The new parliament will draft a provisional constitution for the future Kabyle State. The Parliament will be democratically elected and will have to respect the effective representativeness of the whole Kabylia. In February 2016, the 3rd Congress of the MAK took place, which brought together 843 delegates. During this Congress, the Project for a Kabyle State (PEK) and the Movement's Statutes were amended and adapted to the evolution of the struggle of the Kabyle people and the objectives it has set. The provisions of the Kabyle people's Charter rights were incorporated into the PEK.<sup>2</sup>

Today, Algeria and Kabylia do not recognise each other: Kabylia considers itself to be colonised and part of the population wishes to exercise its right to self-determination. In order to deal with the diplomatic successes of the Kabyle Provisional Government, Algiers seems to be using manipulation to destroy Anavad's audience and undermine the image of Kabylia.<sup>3</sup> Kabylia, for its part, is fighting against the attempt from the Algerian government to "arabise" its children through education, media and the administration. Moreover, its economy is overwhelmed with tax policies, the blockage of economic projects and the

<sup>2</sup> X., Report from the 3d Congress of the Movement for Self-Determination of Kabylia (Kabylia Blog, 6 March 2016) (accessed 3 March 2017).

<sup>3</sup> X., Algerian threats on the marches of 20 April in Kabylia: The Kabyle Provisional Government appeals to international bodies (Kabylia Blog, 11 April 2016) (accessed 3 March 2017).

refusal of investment authorisations. Its natural resources, including oil, lead, zinc and water are also despoiled by the government.

Last but not least, there is a growing insecurity in the region. Over the past 10 years, more than 100 CEOs, merchants or members of their families have been kidnapped in the region. It made more than half of the Kabyle business owners move their businesses away from Kabylia, further exacerbating the disinvestment and unemployment in the region as well as the departure of young people toward European countries and Canada. Public enterprises in the region, which counted with more than 20,000 people in the 70s, count with less than 5,000 people today.



## **CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT**

Kabyle people speak mainly Kabyle, a Berber language from the Afro-Asiatic family. They also speak Algerian Arab, French and, to a lesser extent, English. They are secular, with the majority being atheist. Believers are mainly Muslims, some others Christians - over half a million people - and a handful are Protestant, even though this last community is growing. Few Kabyles claim to be Jewish although a lot of toponyms and family names are of Jewish origin. Respect for each other's religions and beliefs is of primary importance to the Kabyle people.

Located in the south of the Mediterranean, Kabylia's fauna and flora are similar to the ones in Corsica or the southeast of France. The south of Kabylia is flat and the north mountainous. The highest point is Yemma Xlija, culminating at 2,308 meters on the Djurdjura mountain range. The flora is made of olive trees, fig trees, cherry trees, pear trees, among other plants. Some citrus can also be found along the Soummam (east) and Sebaou (west) rivers.

Villages in Kabylia are organised in entities that are quasi-independent, but most of the people left to go live in cities that do not stop growing. Kabylia is known to be overpopulated, with more than 300 people per km<sup>2</sup> on average.

The traditional economy is based on agriculture, while the modern economy is based on the food and services sectors. Kabylia is economically highly - and crucially - supported by the input of its diaspora living in France and Canada. Since Kabylia's defeat against France in 1847, some Kabyles have moved to Paris where they are now a dynamic community of more than two million people.



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