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Focus on the Middle East

Africa

# Resolving Algerian issue through elections

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FOR the first time in six years of turmoil and virtual civil war in Algeria, the Algerian President Liamine Zeroual has agreed to hold multi-party general elections on June 5, 1997. Hopefully, the elections would lead to a representative parliament, which alone can decide the destiny of the great Algerian people.

Basically, the former regimes in Algeria had failed to tackle a purely political issue through political means. The issue started when the former government cancelled the second round of multi-party elections following the massive victory of FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in the first round in December, 1991. The ground for cancelling the elections was not convincing. The former ruling elite (basically secular) argued that if the Islamists were permitted to win the elections, they would never respect democracy. According to them, the FIS

would change the Algerian Constitution and would perpetuate itself in power.

In other words, democracy should mean that all parties could rule except the Islamists. In essence, this argument is at variance with the democratic values. Nobody can predict the future or the behaviour of a given political party without giving it the chance to rule. Furthermore, the FIS is a highly organised party. It has pursued peaceful means to rule Algeria by accepting the rules of the game and by integrating itself in political pluralism. The leader of the FIS, Dr. Abbasi Madani, is a highly educated person. He was even ready to share power with the then ruling FLN (National Liberation Front). Unfortunately, however the confrontationists within Algeria from both sides prevailed. The result has been disaster for millions of Algerian people during the last six years of confrontation.

With the election of Zeroual as President of Algeria, things are slowly changing. Ex-

Elections		
Participate	Boycott	Don't know
78.9%	14.3%	6.8%
Administration		
Neutral	Biased	Don't know
51.2%	14.2%	34.6%
International Observers		
Credible	Not Credible	Don't know
20.7%	75.3%	4%
Origin of issue		
Internal	Foreign	Don't know
49.4%	20.5%	30.1%
Security during election		
Feel secured	Partially secured	Insecure
35.8%	11.3%	52.9%

tremists from both sides are trying to sabotage the election process through violence and acts of terrorism. These are un-Islamic tactics which should be condemned no matter who is using them. Zeroual should be supported in his mission of holding parliamentary elections. By ensuring that these elections are held in a free and fair manner. Zeroual will make history in Algeria. Naturally, elections are meaningless if they are rigged or engineered or if major political parties are barred from contesting them. Let Zeroual initiate a national reconciliation policy to accommodate all Opposition parties including FIS.

ALGERIAN people need real peace. They need stability and security. These objectives cannot be served except by holding free and fair elections. Let the Algerian people speak. Once their voice is conveyed nobody has the right to challenge the sacred verdict of the Algerian people.

According to public opinion

poll conducted by Algerian paper al-Khabar, 78.9 percent of the polled people confirmed that they would take part in the coming elections (see tables). This shows that the Algerian people are keen to resolve the issue through ballots and not through bullet. This resolve is the greatest guarantee that the elections would lead to some kind of solution to the Algerian crisis if they were held in absolutely neutral manner.

Clearly, there is a mixed reaction. The greatest problem seems to be that of ensuring security during the elections since the extremists would attempt to sabotage these elections. On the other hand, if the FIS is not barred from contesting elections, there might be greater sense of security among the people.

Naturally, the net result would be massive participation in the parliamentary elections. This will make the results of the elections even more credible and effective especially if they are held in a free and fair manner.