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Islamic militants in Algeria have killed seven shepherds, including five children, by slitting their throats.

The attack was reported to have occurred on Thursday in a village in the Oued Romane mountains west of the capital Algiers.

It is believed the shepherds had no weapons and were attacked for straying too close to a forest hideout used by the militants.

The mountainous region is often the scene of grisly attacks on civilians by fundamentalists from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), whose members are fighting against the secular state.

The attack - some 30km (20 miles) south of the coastal town of Tenes - follows a raid in late January when two families of 25 members had their throats cut by the GIA rebels near the city of Chlef, 220km (135 miles) west of Algiers.

Nearly 100 people have been killed since the beginning of the year in western Algeria, where the GIA is active.

Conflict

Most of the recent attacks have taken place in the Chlef region where the rebels have set up a stronghold.

Last year, at least 2,700 people lost their lives in the conflict, which has raged for nine years.



The insurgency has been a failure for Mr Bouteflika

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The GIA, which has stepped up its insurgency after several months of relative calm, has rejected peace overtures from President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and vowed to pursue fighting.

Last month, Mr Bouteflika, threatened to fight militants who refuse to support his policy of nationwide reconciliation "with an iron fist".

The civil war broke out in 1992 after the army-backed authorities cancelled an election part of the way through, which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was poised to win.

The conflict has claimed more than 100,000 lives.



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