



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Information on the treatment of a person from Western Sahara by the Moroccan Government. Information on how police in Morocco view suspected Polisario supporters.

The May 2009 *Amnesty International* report for Morocco/Western Sahara, under the heading 'Sahrawi activists', states:

"Sahrawi human rights activists continued to face harassment, including politically motivated charges, restrictions on movement and administrative obstruction to prevent their organizations' legal registration.

-Ennaâma Asfari, co-President of the Committee for the Respect of Freedoms and Human Rights in Western Sahara, who lives in France, alleged that he was tortured by Moroccan security forces when he was detained while visiting the region in April. The authorities did not investigate his allegations and he was convicted of violent conduct and jailed for two months.

-Brahim Sabbar, head of the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH), was told by the security authorities that he should not visit areas in Laayoune in which other ASVDH members live after he was released from prison in June.

Hundreds of Sahrawis suspected of demonstrating against Moroccan rule or distributing pro-Polisario Front materials were arrested. Some were released after questioning; others were tried on charges of violent conduct in proceedings that were reported not to have complied with international standards of fair trial. Many complained that they were tortured or otherwise ill-treated by security forces during questioning and that information allegedly obtained under torture was used as evidence in convictions.

-In October, Yahya Mohamed Elhafed Iaazza, a member of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders, was found guilty of violent conduct and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in connection with his participation in a protest in Tan Tan against Moroccan rule. Eight other defendants received sentences of up to four years in prison. Allegations that they were tortured during questioning were not investigated." (Amnesty International (28 May 2009) - *Amnesty International Report 2009 - Morocco/Western Sahara*)

Chapter 2 of a March 2009 *Amnesty International* report under the heading 'Political context', states:

“In Morocco, for example, the human rights community enjoys relative freedom and the Arab world’s first truth commission (the Equity and Reconciliation Commission) was created to shed light on more than four decades of abuses – enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and other grave human rights violations – between 1956 and 1999. However, human rights defenders in Western Sahara, which Morocco annexed in 1975, face continuing repression. The political sensitivity surrounding the question of Western Sahara, which the Moroccan authorities contend is an integral part of Morocco, make discussion of its status a taboo. It is not only those Sahrawi who advocate for self-determination and independence who are liable to be arrested, detained or imprisoned, but also the human rights defenders who stand up for their rights and who monitor and report on the violations to which they are exposed at the hands of Moroccan security forces.” (Amnesty International (11 March 2009) - *Challenging Repression: Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa*, p.12)

The July 2008 *Freedom House* Freedom in the World report for Western Sahara (Morocco) under the heading ‘Political Rights and Civil Liberties’, states:

“Sahrawis are not permitted to form independent political organizations, and their freedom of assembly is greatly restricted. Moroccan authorities regularly use force when quelling demonstrations and riots in Sahrawi towns and villages. In 2007, there were fewer cases of violent crackdowns on demonstrators. Sahrawis are technically subject to Moroccan labor laws, but there is little organized labor activity in the poverty-stricken region.” (Freedom House (02 July 2008) – *Freedom in the World 2008 – Western Sahara (Morocco)*)

An *IRIN News* report from June 2007 states:

“TINDOUF, 19 June 2007 (IRIN) - Sixteen years after the UN brokered a ceasefire in Western Sahara the peace process has stalled and little has changed for the Sahrawi people who have been divided with those in the Moroccan controlled desert territory unable to have contact with those in the refugee camps in south west Algeria - that is until now.

‘Ever since I was a boy, my mother’s face has stuck with me,’ said 45 year-old Mohamed who last month saw the woman who gave birth to him for the first time in over 30 years. “I recognized her right away.”

The homes of Mohamed and that of his mother are still divided by minefields and the ‘berm’, a garrisoned sand wall more than 2,000 km long. But since 2004, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has run regular flights between the camps and Western Sahara in order to temporarily reunite families.” (IRIN News (19 June 2007) – *WESTERN SAHARA: Families unite but not for long*)

A November 2005 *Amnesty International* document states:

“Since May 2005, the territory of Western Sahara, particularly the town of Laayoune, has been rocked by a series of demonstrations. In many of them, Sahrawi (Western Saharan) demonstrators have expressed their support for the Polisario Front or called for independence from Morocco.(1) These views are anathema to the Moroccan authorities, which have not only responded in a heavy-handed manner to the protests, thereby exacerbating tensions, but also widened the scope of the repression by arresting and detaining long-standing human rights activists who were monitoring and disseminating information on the crackdown.

Eight of the activists are currently in detention and awaiting trial. Amnesty International believes that they may be prisoners of conscience. Two of them allege that they were tortured during questioning. This report focuses on the details of their cases, but also briefly documents the targeting of a wider range of human rights defenders who have been subjected to intimidation by the security forces. The report highlights, in addition, a wider set of allegations of human rights violations against demonstrators, including the death in suspicious circumstances of a Sahrawi protester in October 2005.

Amnesty International has welcomed on numerous occasions the positive steps which the Moroccan authorities have taken in the field of human rights in recent years.(2) However, their uncompromising stance in stamping out any form of dissent on the issue of Western Sahara remains a serious stain on their record. Events this year have set this into stark relief.” (Amnesty International (24 November 2005) – *Moroccan/Western Sahara: Sahrawi human rights defenders under attack*)

References:

Amnesty International (28 May 2009) - *Amnesty International Report 2009 - Morocco/Western Sahara*
<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=printdoc&docid=4a1fadd4c>
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

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ECOI: European Country of Origin Information Network
Freedom House
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International Crisis Group (ICG)
IRB: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
IRIN News
Lexis Nexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
United Kingdom: Home Office
UNHCR Refworld
United States Department of State