

Occupied Western Sahara

The use of hunger strikes and the terror of a house arrest



Urgent Public Appeal

26 January 2021



1 Call for action: Denounce the continued house arrest of prominent Saharawi human rights defender Sultana Khaya and the release of all Saharawi political prisoners

This is the third public appeal issued in response to the **alarming increase of repression and violence** against Sahrawi civilians in the territories of Western Sahara under Moroccan occupation, following the recent escalation of the 45-year conflict between the Polisario Front and Morocco, as well as former US President Donald Trump's recent proclamation recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over the territory, in contravention of International Law.

On 13 November, the 29-year-long ceasefire between Morocco and Polisario came to an end and the armed struggle between the two parties resumed. Ever since, we have witnessed fierce repression carried out in the occupied territories of Western Sahara against the indigenous Saharawi population. Reports from trusted sources say that in response to the escalation of armed conflict and protests on the streets by Sahrawis, allegedly over 35 young Sahrawis have been arrested since 13 November, the youngest being 12 years old and most reported to be between 16 and 17 years old. One of these young Saharawis, 19-year old Ahmed El Gargar, was recently sentenced to a total of 10 months in prison for participating in demonstrations following the end of the ceasefire on 13 November.

Saharawi activists, journalists and human rights defenders, as well as Saharawi civilians, continue to report that they are being targeted by the Moroccan occupying forces. Saharawi human rights defenders and activists report that they are being placed under constant surveillance by the occupying forces; their homes monitored and entire families intimidated and threatened. This includes prominent female Saharawi activist Fatimatou Mohamed Ali Dahouar, who in the past was a victim of forced disappearance, in addition to the female activists Eddahba Sid Emmou and Hayat Khattari, among others. While all of these types of violations are of a continuing nature inside the territory, the recent crackdown has led to the further deterioration of the humanitarian and human rights situation in Western Sahara.

One of the gravest incidents of repression witnessed these past months is the attacks against, and the continued house arrest of, renowned activist Sultana Khaya and her family, lasting for almost 10 weeks and counting. For almost 10 weeks, Sultana and her entire family have been placed under a fierce house arrest and physically and psychologically assaulted. Dozens of Moroccan police and intelligence units have laid siege on the home with the aim of inflicting pain and fear in the family and in the wider Saharawi community, and ultimately of silencing Sultana's voice.

Sultana Khaya is a prominent Saharawi human rights defender known for her fierce advocacy in favor of the Sahrawi right to self-determination. Despite numerous acts of retaliation and untold violence carried out against her intending to silence her advocacy, including the loss of one eye gouged by Moroccan police, Sultana remains one of the most prominent women still standing in the peaceful frontlines against the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. One of the more recent acts of retaliation against Sultana was reported by Human Rights Watch in their release of 18 December 2020 that denounced the Moroccan crackdown on activists in Western Sahara.¹ Sultana's situation, including an update on the recent escalation of aggressions against her and her family, is described in further detail under section 2.

The present appeal is prepared by the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara and the Spanish human rights organization #NomadsHRC in collaboration with the Saharawi journalist organization Equipe Media. A first version of this appeal was published 20 November 2020² and a second version of this appeal was published 4 December 2020.³

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/18/western-sahara-morocco-cracks-down-activists>

² https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/231/5fb80145bd5b7_Appeal_20.11.2020.pdf

³ https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/249/5fca397eace21_JournalistAppeal_04.12.2020.pdf

With this appeal, we ask individuals and organizations to take urgent actions and to appeal to the Moroccan government to abide by their obligations under International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law whilst denouncing the house arrest of Saharawi human rights defender Sultana Khaya and call for the release of all Saharawi political prisoners.

For decades, Morocco has tried to ensure that there are no international witnesses to its human rights violations and breaches of humanitarian law in Western Sahara.⁴ Compounding this information void is the lack of action at the UN to monitor the human rights situation in the territory. The UN peacekeeping mission in the territory (MINURSO) lacks a human rights mandate, and calls by human rights organizations to add human rights monitoring and reporting to the UN mandate have gone unmet. UN Special Procedures continue to be denied independent access to the territory further aggravating the monitoring and protection gap.

Citing the deterioration of the human rights situation in Western Sahara and the lack of access to the territory by independent human rights monitors, on 30 November 2020, Amnesty International issued another call for the UN to engage in human rights monitoring and reporting in Western Sahara, as well as the need for independent reporting. Amnesty and many other international human rights organizations have been banned for years from entering Western Sahara.⁵ With no outside monitors and observers, Sahrawis are left on their own to document and report human rights violations against them.

Those trying to break this blockade are risking their own lives, safety and freedom to do so, as is the case for all currently imprisoned Saharawi activists. In response to their human rights activism 39 Saharawi activists, journalists and human rights defenders find themselves imprisoned in Moroccan jails.⁶

A report published in April 2020 by 26 Saharawi NGOs⁷ details the different cases of Saharawi political prisoners with the arbitrary detention of Saharawi human rights defenders having been widely documented by the UN human rights mechanisms, particularly by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, which has found that Saharawis advocating in favour of self-determination are subjected to discriminatory practices in breach of the equality of human rights.

Ever since the end of the ceasefire of 13 November, reports received indicate that the situation of Saharawi political prisoners is seriously deteriorating, with increased isolation, threats and intimidation. The continued isolation of several of the **Gdeim Izik prisoners** for over three years serves as a vicious reminder of this practice, with the prisoners having been held under arbitrary detention for over a decade following their arrest in conjunction with the dismantlement of the Gdeim Izik protest camp in the occupied territories of Western Sahara in November 2010.⁸



Photo of Gdeim Izik prisoner Mohamed Lamin Haddi

One of the Gdeim Izik prisoners, **Mohamed Lamin Haddi**, held in the Moroccan prison Tifelt 2, is currently on an **open hunger strike** in protest of his prison conditions, including continued isolation, medical negligence and deprivation of basic rights. For instance, Mohamed Lamin is prohibited from eating warm food or drinking warm liquid despite the cold weather -- just one of many examples of arbitrary punishment carried out against him. Tifelt prison is also located over 1000 km away from Western Sahara, where

⁴ <https://rsf.org/en/morocco-western-sahara>

⁵ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/11/human-rights-monitoring-needed-more-than-ever-in-western-sahara/?fbclid=IwAR0uAk6Ggi7e05lddlVakcIqF22ePNyLOPZf9QBN0y-Y31Maex6TOYp86g8>

⁶ As of April 2020. The list does not include the latest incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention witnessed during the months of November and December 2020.

⁷ https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/101/5ea2b523bc7f3_PrisonerAppealApr2020Eng.pdf

⁸ Read more about the Gdeim Izik prisoners here: <https://wsrw.org/en/news/soon-10-years-of-wrongful-imprisonment-release-gdeim-izik-group-now>

Mohamed Lamin's family lives. As is the case for all Saharawi political prisoners held in Moroccan prisons, Mohamed Lamin has not received a visit since before the pandemic, going back to March of 2020.

The Gdeim Izik prisoners held in Tifelt prison – Mohammed Lamin Haddi, Abdallah Abbahah and Elbachir Khadda - have for over three years been held in solitary confinement and subjected to arbitrary punishment, threats and intimidations. Their situation amounts to the infliction of continuous torture for over three years. Mohamed Lamin Haddi commenced his open hunger strike on 12 January 2021 and the Gdeim Izik prisoners held in Kenitra prison also initiated a 48-hour hunger strike on the 20 and 21 January in solidarity with Mohamed Lamin.

Recently - on 25 November - the **Moroccan Court of Cassation confirmed the decision** rendered by the Court of Appeals in Salé in July 2019 against the Gdeim Izik prisoners, thus upholding the lengthy prison sentences for the prisoners. Human rights defenders believe that the decision of the Moroccan Court of Cassation is linked to the escalation of armed conflict between the two parties and that the latest judgement against the Gdeim Izik prisoners **indicates the lack of independence and impartiality on the Moroccan judiciary when dealing with cases of Saharawi activists**, with the court basing its decision on confessions signed under torture. The case of the Gdeim Izik prisoners has amongst other been treated in a joint communication issued by the UN Special Procedures in July 2017 (AL Mar 3/2017)⁹ with the Special Rapporteurs expressing their concern over the violation of the right to due process and evidence showing that the activists had solely been arrested and imprisoned in response to their human rights activism and participation in the peaceful Gdeim Izik protest camp.

The case of imprisoned Saharawi human rights defender **Yahya Mohamed Elhafed Iaazza** similarly remains of great concern after his disappearance on 13 October and his continued ill treatment.¹⁰ Yahya Mohamed disappeared after having been exposed to a prisoner suffering from active COVID-19 on 13 October and was deprived of all contact with the outside world for over 8 weeks. The ill treatment of Yahya Mohamed has continued ever since, including isolation and medical negligence. In an urgent appeal, Front Line Defenders is calling for an end to the ill treatment of Yahya Mohamed and for Morocco to release him from prison.¹¹



Photo of Yahya Mohamed Elhafed Iaazza together with his daughter in 2008. Private photo.

The case of the so-called **Student Group** also continues to be of concern. The case of the Student Group was treated in an opinion rendered by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinion No. 67/2019,¹² holding that their detention is arbitrary and that the students should be released. The Working Group underlined that the students had been imprisoned simply in response to their student activism and their support for the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara, with confessions signed under torture being used as the main evidence against them. Still, Morocco has not implemented the decision. On the contrary, the young students have been subjected to acts of reprisals¹³ in response to their appeal made to the UN (see A/HRC/45/16),¹⁴ with the students still suffering under arbitrary punishment and racial discrimination.

On 21 October 2020, the young Saharawi student **Al-Hussein Al-Bachir Ibrahim** was also sentenced to 12 years in prison by the Appeal courts. Prior to this, his case had been treated in a joint communication issued 7 July 2020 by the UN Special Procedures (Jal Mar 2/2020),¹⁵ expressing serious concerns into the lack of evidence, the use of confessions signed under torture as evidence, and evidence that Hussein had solely been imprisoned due to his activism. The case of Al-Hussein is closely linked to the case of the Student Group,

⁹ https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=23226&fbclid=IwAR1_-DNY-asBo74awPowBXYmPPUKEPuNWAFsb_oevB3VVJ_Ke7RGmo6KVBU

¹⁰ <https://vest-sahara.no/en/news/renowned-saharawi-political-prisoner-disappeared-after-covid-19-exposure>

¹¹ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/whereabouts-imprisoned-human-rights-defender-yahya-mohamed-el-hafed-aaza-unknown>

¹² https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Detention/Opinions/Session86/A_HRC_WGAD_2019_67_AdvanceEditedVersion.pdf

¹³ <https://vest-sahara.no/en/news/the-un-calls-on-morocco-to-release-imprisoned-saharawis>

¹⁴ https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/187/5f67a5f0c0aa9_WGAD2020.pdf

¹⁵ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25422>

with the confessions signed under torture by the Student Group used as evidence against Hussein; in addition to his own unsigned confessions. The continued isolation and ill treatment of **Khatri Dadda**, a 21-year old Saharawi activist and journalist recently sentenced to a total of 20 years in prison, similarly remains of great concern, according to a joint communication issued 21 July 2020 by the UN Special Procedures (JAL Mar 3/2020).¹⁶ In the communication, the UN Special Procedures also expressed serious concerns into the violation of the right to due process. The sentence handed down against Khatri has set out a ripple of fear amongst Saharawi journalists; establishing a dangerous precedence.

Ever since the escalation of the conflict, reports have been received of raids of houses and **arrests of young Saharawis** who participated in demonstrations held in the bigger cities of the occupied territories following the end of the ceasefire on 13 November. During the demonstrations, large groups of young Saharawis took to the streets chanting for their right to self-determination and in support of Front Polisario.¹⁷ One of the young Saharawis who was arrested is 19-year old **Ahmed El Gargar**. He was arrested 14 November 2020 and subjected to torture as soon as he was detained. According to the family, he started to vomit blood and was transported to the hospital, where he remained for the next four days. Ahmed was sentenced to 10 months in prison as punishment for his participation in the demonstrations held on 12 January 2021, and has been transferred to the local prison in Tan Tan. Ever since his arrest, his family has been prevented from visiting him.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, human rights organizations have called on Morocco to release all Saharawi political prisoners. Morocco, however, continues to ignore these calls, as well as similar calls issued by UN human rights mechanisms. In a press release issued 2 November 2020, former president-rapporteur of the UN Working Group Arbitrary Detention, professor Mads Andenæs, stated “In the course of my visit with the Gdeim Izik prisoners during the country visit of the Working Group in 2013, it became clear that Saharawi activists arbitrarily detained suffer from different forms of health problems, some of them a consequence of having been subjected to torture or ill treatment, the inhumane conditions in prison, placing them in acute danger. This is further aggravated by multiple hunger strikes and the lack of medical care. These peaceful activists should immediately be released from prison in light of the imminent threat to their health”.¹⁸

Western Sahara is listed by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory, subjected to the right to self-determination in conformity with the principles contained in UN General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). In 1975, Morocco invaded Western Sahara; a territory in which it does not hold sovereignty over (ICJ Advisory Opinion, Western Sahara, 1975). Since that time, a part of Western Sahara (estimated to be around 80 percent) has been placed under occupation by the Kingdom of Morocco and subsequently illegally annexed. To this day, the situation in the territory remains a humanitarian crisis with systematic, gross human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law being committed as direct consequence of the prolonged illegal military occupation. Morocco has, as the Occupying Power, the *de facto* control, both over most of the territory and the people living on the occupied land, who are deprived of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

«My brother has been held under arbitrary detention for over 10 years. For over 3 years, he has been held in solitary confinement. Imagine being tortured every single day...

That's why he is on hunger strike. Because he simply does not have a choice. He would rather die than spend one more day under this kind of torture»

Brother of Saharawi political prisoner Mohammed Lamin Haddi currently on open hunger strike

¹⁶ <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25448&fbclid=IwAR0TJPydV1yiH-KPlqIJNkOJQxAGOCuXN0zmgXONvGkIdeWdBt1-TxE0sV0>

¹⁷ Front Polisario refers to the Saharawi national liberation movement. The United Nations considers the Polisario Front to be the legitimate representative of the Saharawi people and maintains that the Saharawis have a right to self-determination.

¹⁸ For more information, see: <https://vest-sahara.no/en/news/renowned-saharawi-political-prisoner-disappeared-after-covid-19--exposure>

2 The terror of a house arrest and the case of Sultana Khaya

Sultana Khaya is a prominent Saharawi human rights defender belonging to the recently created Saharawi human rights organization, the Saharawi Organ against Moroccan Occupation (“ISACOM”).



Photo of Sultana KHaya by Democracy Now via [Radfunds](#).

Sultana is known for her activism and fierce advocacy in favour of the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara, despite decades of punishment for her work. The latest acts of reprisal against Sultana relate to an incident of arbitrary arrest, arbitrary excessive police violence and her and her family's ongoing house arrest.

For almost 10 weeks, Sultana and her entire family have been placed under a fierce house arrest and physically and psychologically assaulted. Dozens of Moroccan police and intelligence units have laid siege on the home with the aim of inflicting pain and fear in the family and in the wider Saharawi community, and ultimately of silencing Sultana's voice.

All throughout her house arrest, Sultana has continued to fight to exercise her freedom of expression despite the violence and harassment she and her family are subjected to. Sultana continues to exhibit the banned Sahrawi flag, chant in favour of Sahrawis' right to self-determination and verbally confront armed agents about their violent actions against her and her family -- all the while filming and uploading her ordeal to social media.¹⁹

The violence purveyed against Sultana comes in retaliation against her continued activism in favor of the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara and due to the fact that despite numerous acts of violent repression, she continues to refuse to pledge her allegiance to the occupying country, the Kingdom of Morocco.

While Sultana has been targeted for abuse and surveillance for many years, the repression increased following the creation of the newly established Saharawi human rights organization ISACOM on 20 September 2020. Its main objective, among others, is stated to be "to defend the Sahrawi people's rights to freedom, independence and dignity through legitimate non-violent means". The creation of ISACOM received attention both locally and internationally, and many of its founders are well-known human rights defenders and former political prisoners.

Ever since ISACOM's creation, its members have suffered massive repression, including home sieges and house arrest. As is the case with practically all Sahrawi organizations in the territory that advocate for self-determination, ISACOM is not an entity officially authorized or recognized by the Moroccan government. Its charter specifically states that one of its objectives is to peacefully oppose the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara. On the 29 of September the King's Prosecutor of the court in El Aaiún, Western Sahara, launched an investigation into the establishment of ISACOM, threatening to imprison all its members on the basis that their activities threaten the “territorial integrity” of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Sultana travelled from Western Sahara to Spain on 25 July and returned to the occupied territories on 18 November. Prior to Sultana's return to the occupied territories, Saharawi activists and citizen journalists had been reporting fierce repression, following the end of the ceasefire and return to war of 13 November 2020.

¹⁹ See for example: <https://mobile.twitter.com/Jadiyetumohatar/status/1352583864980533248>

On 19 November, Sultana travelled from El Aaiún to the city of Boujdour (also known by Saharawis as Bujdur and Bojador), where she lives with her family. As Sultana left El Aaiún for Boujdour, police began to surround her family home. En route to her home, Sultana's vehicle was stopped at a checkpoint between the two cities and she was arbitrarily arrested, forced into a vehicle and taken to a police station. She was in custody for around an hour and 20 minutes, during which time she was interrogated, threatened, insulted and subjected to a humiliating search before being released.

By the time Sultana was allowed to continue her journey home, dozens of police vehicles and agents, including some of the most prominent security agents in the city, had besieged the house and cut off access to the street. One of them approached the house and began threatening and insulting the family. According to witnesses and the victims, he entered the home shoving first Sultana's sister and then her elderly mother, who suffered head and back injuries. The assault left the elderly woman unconscious.

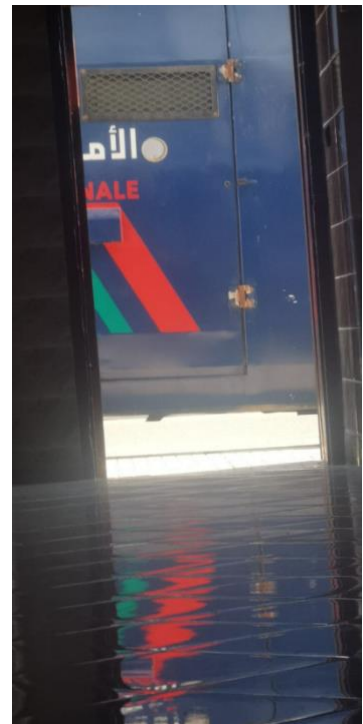
Arriving at her family home soon after, Sultana found the area besieged with agents. She was verbally assaulted and pushed into the house by an officer, who slammed the door behind her. For the next few hours, the family tried to get the mother medical help as they streamed the dramatic situation live on social media. Given her mother's state, Sultana tried to take her to seek medical help. Sultana was at first prevented from transporting her mother to the local hospital in Boujdour; and it was not until after four hours of negotiations, during the night from the 19th to the 20 November, that they were allowed to leave the house and head for the hospital.

Given that the tests her mother needed could not be provided by the local hospital, Sultana attempted to take her mother to the larger hospital in the city of El Aaiún but was prevented from doing so. The family was forced to transport the mother, still in an alarming condition and untreated, back to the house. On the night of 20 November, Sultana's family home was subjected to yet another raid when family members tried to visit in order to check on the health condition of the mother. This time, Sultana's sister was assaulted by police at the doorway of the home and hit on the head with a nightstick, resulting in a serious injury and head wound.

Ever since these two assaults on Sultana's mother and sister, the prominent activist has remained under house arrest together with her family. Family members and activists are arbitrary being prevented from visiting Sultana, and the house is under a 24-hour siege. No justification for the arbitrary violence and *de facto* house arrest have been provided by the Moroccan authorities.

When a house is besieged in Western Sahara, this means that vehicles belonging to Moroccan forces are placed outside the homes of activists on every side, with Moroccan officers patrolling the streets and standing guard outside of their doors and windows. Moroccan officers also block the streets leading up to the house, preventing cars and people from passing by and entering the house. In Sultana's case, police has even blocked the door of the house with police vehicles and has on several occasions forcibly closed the door of the house as she or another family member try to step outside, threatening Sultana and effectively ordering her to stay inside. The Moroccan police and intelligence have even, on two occasions, covered the window of Sultana's home with black plastic in order to prevent her from filming and seeing what is happening outside (see cover photo).

The entrance of the house is patrolled round the clock by Moroccan officers, who attempt to stop people from entering or leaving. On occasions when the officers are not standing directly outside the door, Sultana has attempted to protest the continued house arrest and violence exerted on her entire family by running into the street chanting and waving the flag of Western Sahara. On these occasions, Sultana has been physically



Police blocking the entrance of Khaya's house on 21 November 2020 with a police van.

assaulted by Moroccan police and forced back inside of the house. On one occasion, on 23 December, both Sultana and her sister were subjected to such excessive use of force that police broke some of their fingers when agents violently ripped a Sahrawi flag from their hands. Many of these incidents have been filmed and shared on social media.

The Moroccan police has only briefly lifted the siege on one occasion since 19 November. On the 27 of December 2020, a delegation of prominent Saharawi activists headed by former Rafto Prize laureate and former Saharawi political prisoner Mohammed Daddach traveled from El Aaiún to Boujdour to visit and show solidarity with the Khaya family. After the visit, the entrance of the house was again blocked by Moroccan police officers, and Sultana has not been allowed to leave her house again.

On 17 January 2021, four Saharawi activists travelled from El Aaiún to Boujdour with the intention of visiting Sultana and her family. When the delegation arrived outside the home, Sultana exited to greet them. At this moment, an agent slammed the door in Sultana's sister face and Sultana was effectively hindered from entering the street. As Sultana resisted and continued to film, an agent kicked her in the legs and tried to snatch her phone away. When Sultana refused to enter her house, the agent pushed her violently and she landed on the ground. The delegation of activists was prohibited from entering the house and was subsequently expelled from the city and sent back to El Aaiún in a taxi, according to local journalists. The expulsion of the Saharawi activists attests to the general lack of freedom of movement in the occupied territories in the context of a police state and a military occupation.

According to witness reports, for the next four days the police increased their presence around the perimeter of the house. This includes a scaling up in numbers of officers and vehicles posted outside the house. In addition to the official police and military vans, there are also unmarked vehicles blocking access to the home and to the street. Simultaneously, an increased aggressiveness by the agents placed outside the house has also been observed. Some of these aggressions have been filmed by the family and posted online. One of these incidents took place on 21 January 2021.²⁰

On 21 January, two women activists from Boujdour managed to visit Sultana's home for about an hour. When the two women were about to leave Sultana's house, Sultana went out to accompany them and to try to protect them in case they were attacked. At that moment, Sultana was wearing a facemask with the banned Sahrawi flag. An agent ripped her mask from her face and grabbed her fingers, bending them backwards. He slapped her twice in the face and pushed her against a wall. Sultana's sister then came out to help her and was also assaulted by the police. Eventually Sultana was pushed to the ground and dragged into her home. During the aggression, her *melfha* (traditional Sahrawi dress) was removed. As the aggression took place, police verbally insulted and threatened Sultana and her sister. The women activists who had visited Sultana were also attacked. One was beaten while the other was pushed into her home and ordered not to return to Sultana's house. Sultana and her sister have bandaged their fingers as best they can, as they are impeded from receiving medical treatment. They suspect that several fingers may be broken as they are unable to move them and they are very swollen; their bodies are also covered with bruises.

«The police commissioner told me recently, «My job is to make you crazy. I will not stop until I see you running out in the street naked, screaming». Their aim is to instill fear and to silence me».

Sultana Khaya on her 65th day of house arrest

²⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/100010475146731/videos/1293638010995358/>

What can you do?

To denounce the continued house arrest of Sultana Khaya and call for the release of all Saharawi political prisoners, we encourage **individuals** to:

- 1) Reach out to elected public officials in your city or area and ask them to highlight the issue of Western Sahara and the repression in the occupied territories;
- 2) Write an article in your local newspaper or contact journalists to make them aware of the escalation of the Western Sahara conflict and the repression in the occupied territories;
- 3) Organize a demonstration or meeting in your community in order to protest the continued illegal occupation of Western Sahara and the persecution of Saharawi human rights defenders;
- 4) Use your social media platform to tell about the suffering of the people of Western Sahara and join the international campaign #ReferendumNow for #WesternSahara;
- 5) Encourage five of your friends or family to do the same.

To denounce the continued house arrest of Sultana Khaya and call for the release of all Saharawi political prisoners, we encourage **national NGOs** to:

- 1) Write a letter to your national government and ask them to denounce the house arrest of Sultana and to call for the release of Saharawi political prisoners
- 2) Write a letter to the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and urge him to immediately take action to prevent an humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, addressing the case of Sultana Khaya and Saharawi political prisoners;
- 3) Write a letter to the Moroccan government and ask them to ensure respect for their obligations both under International Human Rights law and International Humanitarian Law and to ensure that all Saharawi activists and civilians are free to conduct their activities and express their opinions without fear of any form of retaliations;
- 4) Take public actions by writing an article or issuing a public appeal or create a campaign in support of the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara and the denouncing of the continued illegal occupation and the repression in the occupied territories of Western Sahara;
- 5) Organize a demonstration or meeting in your community in order to protest the continued illegal occupation of Western Sahara and the persecution of Saharawi human rights defenders.

Published 26 January 2021

This Public Appeal is prepared by the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara and the Spanish human rights organization #NomadsHRC in collaboration with the Sahrawi journalist human rights organizations Equipe Media.

This public appeal is the third appeal published in relation the recent escalation of the Western Sahara conflict and the repression witnessed in the occupied territories of Western Sahara. A first version of this appeal was published 20 November 2020²¹ and a second version of this appeal was published 4 December 2020.²²

This appeal focuses on the continued house arrest of prominent Saharawi human rights defender Sultana Khaya, having lasted for almost 10 weeks and counting, and the deplorable situation of Saharawi political prisoners. With this appeal, we call on individuals and organizations alike to take actions to denounce the house arrest of Sultana and her family and to call for the release of all Saharawi political prisoners.

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²¹https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/231/5fb80145bd5b7_Appeal_20.11.2020.pdf

²²https://vest-sahara.s3.amazonaws.com/skvs/feature-images/File/249/5fca397eace21_JournalistAppeal_04.12.2020.pdf