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REPORT BY UN COMMITTEE ON ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES HIGHLIGHTS MOROCCAN IMPUNITY IN WESTERN SAHARA

After decades of seeking justice for hundreds of disappeared, Sahrawi civil society welcomes the report and urges exhumations and identification of victims from the Morocco-occupied Western Sahara

Moroccan officials suspected of carrying out enforced disappearances and other serious crimes in occupied Western Sahara continue to hold positions of power, according to a [report published on October 10th by the United Nations Committee on Enforced Disappearances \(UN CED\)](#) that highlights how Morocco perpetuates a “climate of impunity” by refusing to investigate and hold perpetrators accountable, instead allowing them to “remain in their posts, including in the security and justice sectors”.

Two weeks after the UN CED held its first-ever review of Morocco in Geneva at its [27th session](#), during which its members questioned a delegation of officials headed by the Moroccan Minister of Justice and its head of intelligence services who denied the mere existence of Western Sahara by referring to it as their “Southern Provinces”, the Committee issued a 15-page report expressing regret that “enforced disappearances committed between 1956 and 1999 have still not been investigated and prosecuted” by Morocco. The UN CED report also noted with concern “the repeated allegations that Sahrawi victims have been particularly exposed to harassment and intimidation” when trying to seek justice, and that “despite the reparation measures mentioned by the State party, it has received repeated allegations of unequal access to reparation, truth and justice, which has particularly affected the Sahrawi victims”.

Sahrawi civil society welcomed the committee’s findings and urged it to go further. “*It has been a decades-long struggle for Sahrawi voices and calls for justice to be heard*”, said the Working Group on Human Rights in Occupied Western Sahara. “*Victims have been threatened and retaliated against by Morocco simply for asking about the whereabouts of family members. We urge the UN to compel Morocco to allow for the exhumation of graves and DNA testing of Sahrawis who were forcefully disappeared to recover loved ones*”, stated Ghaliya Djimi, former victim of enforced disappearance and member of the Working Group.

Since its 1975 invasion of Western Sahara, Morocco has systematically used enforced disappearances as a tool of repression and to suppress the Saharawi people’s right to self-determination. The root of the violations highlighted by the UN CED lies in Morocco’s colonial occupation of Western Sahara and the apartheid régime that Morocco has imposed in the territory, according to Tone Sørffonn Moe, international human rights lawyer serving as legal counsel for Sahrawi victims “*The continued denial of the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara is the cause of all other violations and discrimination against the Sahrawi people*”, she stated.

During the UN CED’s first review of Morocco in Geneva on the 24th and 25th of September, the UN experts questioning the Moroccan delegation did not receive answers on individual criminal responsibility, collective reparations or the preservations of memory sites in Western Sahara, despite most of Morocco’s victims being in or around the territory. Instead, Moroccan officials, including its Minister of Justice, effectively denied the existence of the Sahrawi people, referring to them as Moroccans. “*This is not only contrary to International Law – it also constitutes racial discrimination, an attack on Sahrawi identity and an attempt at collectively disappearing the people of Western Sahara*”, concludes the Working Group.

Prior to the review of Morocco, Saharawi civil society, represented by the Working Group on Human Rights in Occupied Western Sahara supported by the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara, submitted a [114-page long report](#) to the UN CED. In submitting the report, Saharawi civil society denounced the impunity given to Morocco, demanding the creation of a new independent body to review the violations committed by Morocco as an Occupying Power in Western Sahara.

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