

Shadow report to the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic combined Periodic
Report (hereinafter “the SADR” or “Western Sahara”)

**Submission to the 87th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on
Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders in
Western Sahara**

Submitted by

International Service for Human Rights, Working Group on Human Rights in
Occupied Western Sahara, & Front Line Defenders

April 2026

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I. Introduction

1. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), Working Group on Human Rights in Occupied Western Sahara (WGHRWS)¹ and Front Line Defenders acknowledge the periodic report submitted by the Government of the SADR to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Commission or ACHPR), covering the period from 2013 to 2025. The SADR submitted this report in compliance with its obligations under Article 62 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter).
2. This shadow report addresses persistent and systemic human rights violations in the occupied parts of Western Sahara placed under occupation by the Kingdom of Morocco, with a specific focus on human rights defenders and reprisals against them and the exploitation of natural resources as a tool to normalise and entrench the occupation.
3. The review of the African Commission is timely and highly welcomed. Due to the continued occupation, closing down of the territory, expulsion of international observers and lack of international oversight mechanisms, the human rights situation in Occupied Western Sahara remains largely unmonitored and underreported. This absence of an international human rights monitoring mandate, combined with restrictions on access for independent observers, has enabled an environment of impunity.

¹ The Working Group on Human Rights in Western Sahara is an independent initiative established to address the absence of effective international human rights monitoring in the territory. The Working Group is composed of Sahrawi human rights defenders representing Saharawi civil society alongside international activists and focuses on documentation of violations and engagement with United Nations and African Union mechanisms.

II. Occupied Western Sahara and scope of review

4. Western Sahara is universally recognised as a Non-Self-Governing Territory entitled to the right to self-determination in accordance with UN General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV), as affirmed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its Advisory Opinion on Western Sahara (1975). The SADR has been a member state of the African Union since 1982.
5. The Sahrawi people have not yet been able to exercise their right to self-determination. Since 1975, the Kingdom of Morocco has subjected the greater parts of Western Sahara to colonial and foreign occupation, depriving its people of self-determination through measures culminating in the partition and annexation of the territory without consultation or United Nations supervision. The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, in its 2024 Advisory Opinion, confirmed that the continued occupation of Western Sahara constitutes a violation of the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination and triggers corresponding obligations on all African Union (AU) Member States to promote and protect that right.
6. This report is submitted on the basis that the ACHPR is competent to assess the human rights situation across the entirety of Western Sahara, including those areas currently under the effective control of the Kingdom of Morocco. Notably, the existence of foreign occupation does not transfer sovereignty nor fragment the territorial integrity of a Non-Self-Governing Territory (ICJ, Namibia Advisory Opinion, para. 52). States and international bodies are under an obligation not to recognise as lawful situations created by serious breaches of international law (*ibid.*, para. 125). Similarly, international law is clear that human rights obligations extend to territories under a State's effective control, including occupied territories (ICJ, Wall Advisory Opinion, paras. 89, 106, 111).

7. As a consequence, international bodies, including the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, consistently assess occupied territories as unified legal entities. In its Advisory Opinion on the Wall, the ICJ examined Israel's conduct across the entirety of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, without fragmenting the territory based on differing forms of control (ICJ, Wall Advisory Opinion, para. 78). United Nations treaty bodies have also, in their review of the State of Palestine, consistently assessed the human rights situation across the entirety of the Palestinian territory, including those areas under Israeli occupation, based on the territorial unity of Palestine.² This practice demonstrates that, where a territory is under review, human rights bodies do not exclude those parts of the territory under foreign occupation. Rather, they assess the human rights situation across the territory as a whole, including the impact of conduct attributable to an occupying power. Any limitation of the scope of review based on the existence of occupation would be inconsistent with the right to self-determination, the principle of non-recognition, and the established extraterritorial application of human rights obligations.

III. Human Rights Defenders in Occupied Western Sahara

8. Human rights defenders (HRDs) in occupied Western Sahara operate in an environment marked by systematic repression, where peaceful human rights work is treated as a security threat. Sahrawi human rights defenders

² While the State of Palestine is the entity under review, UN bodies have explicitly addressed the impact of Israeli policies and practices within the territory on the enjoyment of human rights. For example, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its Concluding Observations on Palestine, examined the State party's obligations in light of constraints arising from the occupation (CEDAW/C/PSE/CO/1, 2018). Similarly, the Committee on the Rights of the Child addressed the treatment of Palestinian children affected by Israeli military operations and detention practices (CRC/C/PSE/CO/1, 2020). The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has likewise assessed the enjoyment of Covenant rights in relation to restrictions on land, movement and resources arising within the occupied territory (E/C.12/PSE/CO/1, 2019).

documenting violations, mobilising communities, or asserting the right to self-determination are exposed to overlapping forms of criminalisation, physical and psychological abuse, sexual violence, surveillance, and restrictions on fundamental freedoms.^{3 4}

9. Over the past several years, the UN Special Procedures have consistently raised concerns regarding allegations of systematic targeting of and reprisals against Saharawi human rights defenders, journalists and activists for engaging with international human rights mechanisms and exercising their fundamental freedoms through a series of joint communications addressing both individual and collective cases.⁵ Notably, the UN Special

³ Western Sahara reports, Voices breaking free from repression, https://www.westernsaharareports.com/en/voices_2024_ing/

⁴ Human Rights Watch, UN: Western Sahara Peoples' Self-Determination at Risk, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/25/un-western-sahara-peoples-self-determination-at-risk>

⁵ See UN Communication Al Mar 5/2025 of 30 July 2025 concerning Mhamed Hali, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30219>, Communication Mar 4/2025, of 17 July 2025, concerning Sukeina Ammadour and Hussein Bachir Brahimi, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30171>, Communication Al Mar 2/2025 of 20 March 2025, concerning 79 victims, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29772>, Communication MAR 1/2025 of 12 February 2025, concerning Ali Salem Tamek, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29685>, Communication Al Mar 2/2024 of 3 January 2025 concerning Hassana Douihi, Ahmed Ettanji, Mohammed Mayara and Sidi Mohammed Daddach, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29584>, Communication Al MAR 2/2023 of 24 May 2023 concerning Al-Hussein Al-Bashir Ibrahim, Khatri Dadda and Naama Asfari. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28076>, Communication AL Mar 3 / 2022 of 4 October 2022 (Mhamed Hali). URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27599>, Communication Al Mar 5/ 2020 of 7 January 2021 (8 victims). URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25731>, Communication UA Mar 5/2021 of 10 June 2021 (14 victims). URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26478>, Communication AL MAR 4/2021 of 16 June 2021 (2 victims). URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26415>, Communication Al Mar 2/2020, dated 7 September 2020, Hussein Bachir Brahimi. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25422>, Communication Al Mar 3/2020, dated 21 July 2020 concerning Khatri Dadda. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=25448>, Communication AL MAR 3/2019 dated 8 November 2019 concerning Walid Salek El Batal.

Procedures have emphasised that the continued denial of the Saharawi people's right to self-determination forms part of the structural context in which human rights violations occur in the territory (AL MAR 2/2025, 20 March 2025). In the communication, mandate holders, raised allegations of systematic repression, racial discrimination, arbitrary detention, violence and ill-treatment targeting Saharawi human rights defenders, journalists and activists advocating self-determination.

Systematic criminalisation of human rights work

10. Sahrawi human rights defenders are systematically subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, with their activism being criminalised through the use of vague and broadly framed provisions of Moroccan criminal law relating to territorial integrity, public order, and state security. This is confirmed through numerous opinions rendered by the United Nations (UN) Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, finding a consistent pattern of arbitrary arrest, torture upon arrest and the use of confessions allegedly obtained under torture as the basis for detention and conviction.⁶

URL:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24936>, Communication AL MAR 2/2019 dated 4 June 2019 concerning Naziha El Khalidi. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24651>, Communication AL MAR 1/2019 dated 3 April 2019 concerning Naziha El Khalidi. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=24506>, Communication AL MAR 3/2017 dated 20 July 2017 concerning the Gdeim Izik Group. URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=23226>

⁶ See cases A/HRC/WGAD/2017/11 concerning Salah Eddin Bassir. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2017/11&Lang=E>, A/HRC/WGAD/2018/31 concerning Mohamed Al-Bambary. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2018/31&Lang=E>, A/HRC/WGAD/2018/58 concerning Ahmed Aliouat. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2018/58&Lang=E>, A/HRC/WGAD/2018/60 concerning Mbarek Daoudi. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2018/60&Lang=E>, A/HRC/WGAD/2019/23 concerning Laaroussi Ndour. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2019/23&Lang=E>,

11. Arrests are often carried out without judicial warrants and are accompanied by excessive force. Human rights defenders are commonly held incommunicado for extended periods, denied access to lawyers, and subjected to prolonged pre-trial detention. Judicial proceedings in politically sensitive cases consistently fall short of international fair trial standards. Courts routinely rely on police reports as primary evidence, even when defendants allege that statements were extracted under torture. Requests for independent medical examinations, summons of defence witnesses, or investigations into allegations of abuse are systematically rejected. UN Special Procedures have repeatedly expressed concern with Morocco's lack of compliance with fair trial rights for Sahrawis⁷.
12. The case of the *Gdeim Izik* group remains emblematic of this pattern⁸. Sahrawi human rights defenders and activists arrested following the

A/HRC/WGAD/2019/67 concerning the Student Group. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2019/67&Lang=E>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2020/52 concerning Ali Saadouni. URL: <https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WGAD/2020/52&Lang=E>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2020/68 concerning Walid Salek El Batal. URL: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/025/83/PDF/G2102583.pdf?OpenElement>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2021/46 concerning Yahya Mohamed Elhafed Iaazza. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/A-HRC-WGAD-2021-46-Maroc-AEV.pdf>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2022/50 concerning Sultana Khaya and Luara Khaya. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session94/hrc-wgad-2022-50-maroc-aev.pdf>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2023/23 concerning the Gdeim Izik prisoners. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session96/A-HRC-WGAD-2023-23-AEV.pdf>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2023/67 concerning Khatri Dadda. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session98/a-hrc-wgad-2023-67-morocco-aev.pdf>,
A/HRC/WGAD/2024/63 concerning Al-Hussein Al-bashir Ibrahim. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session101/a-hrc-wgad-63-2024-morocco-advance-edited-v.pdf>.

⁷ AL MAR 5/2025 URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=30219>

⁸ Statement, Front Line Defenders (2023), <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/western-saharamorocco-morocco-must-immediately-release-gdeim-izik-human-rights>

dismantling of the protest camp in 2010.⁹ Nevertheless, lengthy prison sentences have been upheld, reinforcing the perception that the judiciary is used as a tool of repression rather than protection.

13. Criminalisation also extends to administrative harassment, including repeated summonses, fines, and threats of prosecution, which serve to exhaust defenders financially and psychologically while deterring others from engaging in human rights work.¹⁰

Torture, ill-Treatment, and sexual violence

14. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment are widely reported by Sahrawi human rights defenders, particularly during arrest, interrogation, and the early stages of detention.¹¹ Reported methods include severe beatings, suffocation, stress positions, sleep deprivation, threats of rape, and prolonged solitary confinement. These abuses are often aimed at extracting confessions, punishing activism, or intimidating defenders into silence.¹²
15. Sexual violence is used as a specific tool of repression, particularly against women human rights defenders. Survivors report rape, sexual assault, invasive body searches, and sexualised threats by law enforcement officers. Such violence is frequently accompanied by racist and degrading language targeting Sahrawi identity. The use of sexual violence not only causes

⁹ UN WGAD: A/HRC/WGAD/ 23/2023 concerning the Gdeim Izik prisoners. UN Special Procedures: Gdeim Izik prisoners (AL MAR 3/2017), UN CAT: Naama Asfari (CAT/C/59/D/606/2014), Mohammed Bouryal (CAT/C/72/D/923/2019), Sidi Abdallah Abahah (CAT/C/72/D/871/2018), Abdeljalil Laaroussi (CAT/C/74/D/891/2018), Mohammed Bani (CAT/C/75/D/999/2020)

¹⁰ Western Sahara reports, Voices breaking free from repression, https://www.westernsaharareports.com/en/voices_2024_ing/

¹¹ See A/HRC/22/53/Add 2, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez. Mission to Morocco (2013), A/HRC/27/48/Add5, Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Mission to Morocco (2013).

¹² Western Sahara reports, Voices breaking free from repression, https://www.westernsaharareports.com/en/voices_2024_ing/

severe physical and psychological harm but also serves to stigmatise defenders within their communities.¹³

16. The case of *Sultana Khaya*, a prominent Sahrawi human rights defender, illustrates this pattern. For several years, she and members of her family were subjected to repeated assaults, including sexual violence, during periods of her de facto arbitrary house arrest.¹⁴ UN Special Rapporteurs publicly raised concerns that the treatment she endured could amount to torture and called on the Moroccan authorities to ensure protection and accountability.¹⁵ No effective investigation has been carried out, and alleged perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity.

17. Complaints of torture¹⁶ and sexual violence filed by Sahrawi defenders are rarely investigated. Prosecutors routinely dismiss allegations without inquiry, and courts admit confessions despite credible claims of coercion.¹⁷ This entrenched impunity perpetuates further abuse and reinforces fear among defenders.

¹³ Report Resilience in Resistance (2024), <https://festivalsahara.org/en/news/report-resilience-in-resistance/>

¹⁴ A/HRC/WGAD/50/ 2022 concerning Sultana Khaya and Luara Khaya. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/detention-wg/opinions/session94/hrc-wgad-2022-50-maroc-aev.pdf>

¹⁵ Communication UA Mar 5/2021 of 10 June 2021 (14 victims). URL: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=26478>, Press release, Morocco: UN human rights expert decries “clampdown” on human rights defenders, 1 July 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/07/morocco-un-human-rights-expert-decries-clampdown-human-rights-defenders>

¹⁶ Testimony of Ali Salem Tamek (2022), <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/testimonial/ali-salem-tamek-testimony>

¹⁷ See CAT/C/MAR/CO/4, Committee against Torture, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under Article 19 of the Convention, concluding observations of the Committee against torture (2011). Confirmed through individual decisions: Naama Asfari (CAT/C/59/D/606/2014), Mohammed Bouryal (CAT/C/72/D/923/2019), Sidi Abdallah Abahah (CAT/C/72/D/871/2018), Abdeljalil Laaroussi (CAT/C/74/D/891/2018), Mohammed Bani (CAT/C/75/D/999/2020), Omar Ndour (CAT/C/72/650/2015). See also CED/C/MAR/CO/1, Committee on Enforced Disappearance, Concluding observations on Morocco, A/HRC/22/53/Add 2, Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez. Mission to Morocco (2013), A/HRC/27/48/Add5, Report of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Mission to Morocco (2013).

Surveillance and restrictions on freedom of movement

18. Sahrawi human rights defenders are subjected to pervasive surveillance that intrudes into all aspects of their private and professional lives.¹⁸ Defenders report constant police presence near their homes, monitoring of visitors, interception of communications, and digital surveillance of phones and social media accounts. This surveillance creates a climate of intimidation and self-censorship, limiting defenders' ability to organise, document violations, or communicate securely.¹⁹
19. Restrictions on movement and access to territory are also used to prevent Sahrawi human rights defenders from carrying out their work and maintaining social and professional networks. The case of [Mohamed Mayara](#)²⁰ illustrates this pattern. On 9 October 2024, [the Moroccan authorities harassed](#), threatened to arrest and expelled the human rights defenders Ahmed Ettanji and Mohamed Mayara from the town of Cape Bojador, in occupied Western Sahara, while they were in the town for a family visit. The host family was also subjected to intimidation and threats of search. Such practices amount to de facto restrictions on freedom of movement and demonstrate how authorities extend repression beyond defenders themselves to those who associate with or support them. This restriction on the freedom of movement of the human rights defenders was done in order to prevent them from visiting the victims of the attack.

Restrictions on freedom of association, assembly, expression, and legal activity

¹⁸ Reference also to CERD/C/MAR/CO/19-21, Committee on Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined nineteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Morocco

¹⁹ Western Sahara reports, Voices breaking free from repression, https://www.westernsaharareports.com/en/voices_2024_ing/

²⁰ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/moroccan-authorities-expel-human-rights-defenders-ahmed-ettanji-and-mohamed-mayara-occupied-1>

20. The rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression are severely restricted in occupied Western Sahara.²¹ Independent Sahrawi human rights organisations are systematically denied legal registration, despite repeated attempts to comply with domestic legal requirements. Operating without legal status exposes organisations and their members to prosecution, raids, and confiscation of equipment.²²
21. The homes of known human rights defenders are also blockaded by the occupying authorities at points of heightened tension. This was the case on 26 and 27 February 2025, when the houses of several human rights defenders in Laayoune were blockaded, including the house of Ali Salem Tamek, the President of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA)²³, following the violent dispersion on 25 February of protests including the President of the Sahrawi Association for Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH) Bachri Ben Taleb.
22. Peaceful demonstrations are routinely banned or violently dispersed, particularly when participants display Sahrawi symbols or express political views related to self-determination. Law enforcement officials frequently use excessive force, resulting in injuries and arbitrary arrests. Human rights

²¹ See also CERD/C/MAR/CO/19-21, Committee on Racial Discrimination, Concluding observations on the combined nineteenth to twenty-first periodic reports of Morocco, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/cerdcmarco19-21-concluding-observations-combined-nineteenth>, CCPR/C/MAR/CO/6, Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the sixth periodic report of Morocco, (2016), <https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/MAR/CO/6>, E/C.12/MAR/CO/4, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Morocco (2015), <https://docs.un.org/en/E/C.12/MAR/CO/4>,

²² See especially cases of Saharawi human rights organizations CODESA and ASVDH, UN Communication Al Mar 2/2025 of 20 March 2025, concerning 79 victims, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29772>

²³ Front Line Defenders “Multiple attacks on the physical integrity of Sahrawi human rights defenders and flagrant violation of the right to peaceful assembly” <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/statement-report/western-saharamorocco-multiple-attacks-physical-integrity-sahrawi-human-rights>

defenders documenting these events are often specifically targeted, assaulted, or detained.²⁴

23. Freedom of expression is curtailed through censorship, intimidation, and judicial harassment. Sahrawi journalists, bloggers, and citizen reporters face confiscation of cameras and phones, physical assaults, and prosecution for online content. State-aligned media outlets regularly engage in smear campaigns against defenders, portraying them as traitors or foreign agents, thereby legitimising further repression.²⁵
24. Public meetings, trainings, and cultural events organised by Sahrawi activists are frequently banned or disrupted. Homes used for meetings are surrounded by police, and participants are subjected to identity checks and intimidation. These restrictions severely limit the ability of Sahrawi human rights defenders to organise collectively, share information, and exercise their fundamental rights.²⁶
25. The repression of Sahrawi human rights defenders also extends to professional and economic retaliation aimed at silencing voices in favour of the right to self-determination. The case of Mhamed Hali²⁷ illustrates this pattern. In June 2024, [the Moroccan Court of Cassation upheld a decision denying him access to the legal profession](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/moroccan-court-cassation-upheld-judgment-depriving-human-rights-defender-mhamed-hali-his-right), despite his full compliance with all legal requirements, solely on the basis of his human rights work and public support for the right to self-determination. This decision constitutes discriminatory treatment based on political opinion. His case reflects a

²⁴ Western Sahara reports, Voices breaking free from repression, https://www.westernsaharareports.com/en/voices_2024_ing/

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. UN Communication Al Mar 2/2025 of 20 March 2025, concerning 79 victims, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=29772>

²⁷ <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/case/moroccan-court-cassation-upheld-judgment-depriving-human-rights-defender-mhamed-hali-his-right>

broader pattern whereby Sahrawi defenders are prevented from accessing legal and public sectors, as a means of punishment and deterrence.

Exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara

26. The exploitation of natural resources in Western Sahara serves as a structural driver of human rights violations and the repression of Sahrawi defenders. Natural resources are extracted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Sahrawi people, which violates international law and the right to self-determination. Defenders and community members who document these activities face frequent surveillance, harassment, and reprisals, particularly when they engage with international actors or challenge the legality of such operations. These economic interests further entrench the occupation by reinforcing continued territorial control and stifling dissent. As a result, the restrictions on civic space in Western Sahara are inextricably linked to a broader political economy of occupation in which resource extraction plays a central role.

I. Recommendations

27. To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights:

- i. Publicly condemn reprisals, intimidation, and harassment against Sahrawi human rights defenders and civil society actors, including those engaging with international and regional mechanisms.
- ii. Ensure systematic and sustained follow-up on cases and communications related to human rights violations in Western Sahara, including during State reporting and promotional missions.
- iii. Facilitate safe, accessible, and confidential channels for Sahrawi civil society to engage with the Commission, including during public sessions and through protection-oriented mechanisms.

- iv. Initiate a fact-finding mission to assess the situation of human rights defenders and civic space in Western Sahara, including allegations of torture, reprisals, and restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly.

28. Raise the following recommendations to the Kingdom of Morocco, as the occupying power, during the State review of Western Sahara

- i. Immediately cease all forms of harassment, surveillance, intimidation, and reprisals against Sahrawi human rights defenders, journalists, and activists.
- ii. Release all Sahrawi activists and human rights defenders arbitrarily detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights.
- iii. Ensure prompt, independent, and effective investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment, and hold those responsible accountable.
- iv. Suspend all natural resource exploitation activities in Western Sahara carried out without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Sahrawi people.
- v. Grant access to Western Sahara to ACHPR and UN mechanisms, independent observers, and international civil society.

ABOUT THIS PARALLEL REPORT

This report was prepared by the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), the Working Group on Human Rights in Occupied Western Sahara (WGHRWS) and Front Line Defenders. ISHR is an international non-governmental organisation based in Geneva with offices in New York and Abidjan dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders and the promotion of their work.

The Working Group on Human Rights in Western Sahara is an independent initiative established to address the absence of effective international human rights monitoring in the territory. The Working Group is composed of Sahrawi human rights defenders representing Saharawi civil society alongside international activists and focuses on documentation of violations and engagement with United Nations and African Union mechanisms.

Front Line Defenders (FLD) is an international human rights organisation founded in Dublin in 2001, with the specific aim of protecting human rights defenders at risk.

We encourage the African Commission to consult parallel reports by local activists and to make recommendations regarding the protection of human rights defenders.