



To the Foreign Minister of Morocco, H.E Nasser Bourita

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Rabat Morocco

Brussels, 19th June 2019

Dear Minister,

We wish to raise to your kind attention the situation of Saharawi human rights defenders, and notably that of Ali Salem Boujama Saadouni, Brahim Dihani and Naziha El Khalidi, and of the Saharawi human rights organization ASVDH, whose current fate is of serious concern to us.

Credible human rights organizations have informed us that Sahrawi human rights defenders and organisations in Western Sahara have been increasingly targeted by the Moroccan authorities in recent months. In particular, they have drawn our attention to several individual cases of pressing concern.

The sentence against human rights defender Ali Salem Boujama Saadouni, in May 2019 to seven months in prison and a significant fine on charges of drug possession and violence against a police officer, is perceived by the local human rights defenders as reprisal for his human rights activities in Western Sahara.

Brahim Dihani is a human rights defender who monitors and documents peaceful protests, working with the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH). On 18 December 2018, Brahim Dihani was charged with "breaching the right to privacy" for his documentation of peaceful protests in the city of Laayoune over the previous months. On 6 February 2019, the Court of First instance of Laayoune, Western Sahara ruled in favour of his acquittal and dropped all charges against him, but the prosecutor has appealed the acquittal. We understand that his hearing will be this Thursday 20 June.

Sahrawi woman human rights defender Naziha El Khalidi will appear in court on Monday 24 June. According to our information, in December 2018, she was beaten, detained, and her phone confiscated by the police for four hours for interrogation for filming the blockade of a peaceful protest on a street in Laayoune. She is accused of "claiming a title/position protected by the law", specifically of falsely claiming to be a journalist. The charge would be linked to her work at Equip Media, documenting human rights violations committed against the Sahrawi people. She faces between 3 months and 2 years in prison.



ASVDH, an independent human rights NGO that operates in Western Sahara, has reportedly faced repeated obstructions in carrying out its human rights activities. We were informed that on 9 May 2019, security forces surrounded the premises of ASVDH and blocked the delivery of new equipment. On 11 May 2019, security forces similarly surrounded the building and stopped all staff from entering. ASVDH has filed a complaint but would have received no answer to date from the Prosecutor's Office in Laayoune.

Based on the above information, we are extremely concerned about the situation of these three human rights defenders and that of ASVDH and we believe they are being targeted solely as a result of their legitimate activities in defence of human rights. In line with the commitment of the Moroccan government to uphold international human rights standards, including with regards to the activities of human rights defenders and organizations, we would urge you to ensure that the sentences of Brahim Dihani and of Ali Salem Boujama Saadouni are quashed, that they are acquitted and immediately released; that the charges against Naziha El Khalidi are dropped; and that the harassment against Sahrawi human rights defenders and organisations, including ASVDH is stopped, and that their safety and ability to carry out their work is guaranteed.

Yours sincerely,

Florent Marcellesi, MEP  
Ana Maria Gomes, MEP  
Ivo Vajgl, MEP  
Miguel Urbán Crespo, MEP  
Ana Miranda, MEP  
Bart Staes, MEP  
María Eugenia Rodríguez Palop, MEP  
Ernest Urtasun, MEP  
Estefanía Torres Martínez, MEP  
Bodil Valero, MEP  
Margrete Auken, MEP  
Idoia Villanueva, MEP  
Klaus Buchner, MEP