

Bureau Européen pour
le Respect des Droits
de l'Homme au Sahara

Occidental

Dignité
Dignity



Address:

Case Postale 53
1211 GENEVE 9
SUISSE

Fax et tél :
41.22.320.65.50

E-mail:
bdh_sahara@hotmail.com

Dignita
Dignidad

Carrots and Sticks After the liberation of Saharawi political prisoners terror soon replaced joy

A big thank you to everyone for taking part in the campaign for the liberation of the Saharawi political prisoners!

On 7 November 2001, the Moroccan radio announced the amnesty of 24 Saharawi prisoners (2 prisoners had been freed at the end of their sentences, two days before), the very ones that we asked you to take action for in our last Karama in September. Joy exploded in the occupied zones, as if fear had fallen away, as if everything had suddenly become possible. However, the days following were cruel.

Imagine the Saharawis of El Ayoun singing, dancing and celebrating in a popular festival and with unprecedented emotion, the liberation of their brothers just out of Moroccan prisons a few days earlier. Imagine Mohamed Daddach, condemned to death, a prisoner for 24 years, welcomed to El Ayoun like a hero: hundreds of Saharawis file past him kissing him, touching him, embracing him. This man who was believed dead has come back; despite his delicate health, his hunger strikes, which have weakened him, he has never denied what he is certain of: He says it again and again: the Sahara is not Moroccan and he is a Saharawi. The party music had scarcely died away before the repression and torture and imprisonments began again.

Twenty three political prisoners had been arrested for having demonstrated in El Ayoun and Smara. They started an unlimited hunger strike and detainees in common law joined them. On the morning of 2 January, as they had already done before, 70 mothers of the detainees gathered in front of the district office to demand their immediate release. With no result.

The bright spell had been short-lived. How can we interpret these spectacular liberations which follow an international involvement to be sure, but equally an unprecedented mobilisation of Saharawis in Western Sahara itself, and in Morocco? Can they be understood as linked to the liberation of Moroccan prisoners just freed by the Polisario or with its decision not to intervene during the passage of the Dakar rally through the Western Sahara?

Our vigilance must be permanent. We cannot doze off and leave today's prisoners in silence and indifference. But more action awaits us also. It concerns the disappeared Saharawis.

Success of a Campaign

The day of the announcement of the release of the Saharawi political prisoners, in the middle of our campaign, we had collected nearly 4000 signatures, including those of regional, national and European parliamentarians, officers of trades unions, political organisations and associations etc... The internet campaign enabled us to widen the circle : in Europe of course, but also to Africa, Latin America, North America, Asia, and even to Morocco. Many initiatives were undertaken to collect signatures, particularly in France, Italy, Spain, Switzerland... but also in Japan and elsewhere. Not to mention the mobilisation of the Saharawi people in the occupied zones which worked in synergy with the international campaign to obtain our stated objective. We thank all those who, both near and far, contributed to the victory of our action.

"It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare, but because we don't dare that these things are difficult." (Seneca, known as *the philosopher*)

Story of a campaign :

At the end of August we are ready to launch our campaign. The list of Saharawi political prisoners sentenced by Moroccan courts had been completed, after several months' work. The text of the Appeal is drawn up in three languages, French, English and Spanish. We will also launch it on internet, a first for us. But it is Mohamed Daddach himself who starts the campaign off by beginning a hunger strike on 23 August. He will soon be joined by all the other Saharawi prisoners.

9 September: creation in El Ayoun of the Action Committee for the release of Daddach and all the Saharawi detainees. For the first time, the European Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara (BERDHS0) intervenes directly to offer its solidarity, demonstrating unity of action with human rights defenders inside and outside Western Sahara.

Then for the whole of September - October, signatures come in : by email, by post, initiatives are taken in different countries. In the Saharawi refugee camps, AFAPREDESA (Association of Families of Saharawi Prisoners and Disappeared) mobilises the population. And above all, in the occupied zones, the Saharawi people take up the campaign on their own behalf, strengthened by the international campaign.

7 November : at the end of the afternoon, like every day, it is time to check the signatures received. 18.50: telephone call from El Ayoun, we learn that Moroccan television has announced the amnesty of all the Saharawi prisoners. The criteria cited correspond with all those for whom we are campaigning, including Daddach. Doubts, incredulity, hope. Not believing it, we must wait another hour to have confirmation after several more phone calls. It is confirmed, the prisoners should be leaving the same night. Our Saharawi correspondents and we ourselves, have difficulty believing it. So much emotion. We wish we could embrace each other.

21.30 : telephone from El Ayoun. The detainees in the capital of Western Sahara are about to leave the prison, welcomed by the population. We hear slogans being shouted by the crowd and its joy. This makes us shiver. An hour later they announce that the detainees of Marrakech are leaving, welcomed by Saharawi students in the town. And Daddach? He is not yet out, but he has been asked to pack his things. It is late, and it is only the next day that we find out that he left Kenitra about 23.30 and that he's in Rabat where Saharawi students will receive him that afternoon. From that moment, the Saharawis get us to participate almost hour by hour in the crazy days of their prisoners' return to freedom by telephone from Rabat on 8 November, in El Ayoun, in Smara ...

It is on Saturday 10 that the Saharawis of El Ayoun will greet the symbol of their fight for freedom. Daddach, flanked by other liberated prisoners arrives on the outskirts of the town where nearly 300 people are waiting for him. Moved and tired he greets each person one by one before kneeling down and thanking God. He arrives at the place of the demonstration (several thousand) surrounded by police cordons. The crowd is delirious, acclaiming him. There again, we are linked to the Saharawi people by telephone and congratulate them on their courage and mobilisation. The next day, another

phone call: they say "He wants to talk to you". And I hear Mohamed Daddach thanking us in a few words of Spanish. It is really him, the one we've been fighting for all these years, the longest-standing Saharawi political prisoner, held for 22 years. He is on the other end of the line, he is FREE. I have trouble containing my emotion.

However, we know that this victory, which fundamentally is due to the mobilisation of the Saharawi people, is very fragile. As proof of this: the repression of demonstrations in Smara on 17 November, the pressure put on the liberated prisoners, the ban on Daddach attending a meeting in Assa. But it is also a breath of hope for the Saharawi people that they really needed at the present time.

Daddach and the other released Saharawis are for us all an example of courage of *dignity* which gives us strength in our work of solidarity.



**LETTER OF THANKS
TO ALL THE FORCES OF SOLIDARITY
FOR THE CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS FOR
THE SAHARAWIS**

Dear Friends of the Saharawi people,

At the moment when you are getting ready for a big conference of solidarity with my people, I am happy and honoured to send you some words of affection and respect for the hard work that you are doing to support our people, but above all to thank you for your solidarity with the Saharawi political prisoners. Today, thanks to your action over 20 Saharawi prisoners, among them my son, Sidi Mohamed Daddach, have regained freedom. I would like to dedicate a special gesture of affection to the European Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara for its constant work, victorious through the liberation of Saharawi prisoners of conscience. This association is a blessing for all the mothers, wives, daughters and sons of so many people held by the occupying forces in appalling conditions. I would also like to give homage to President Danielle Mitterrand, who came to visit me in my tent. Her visit gave me enormous comfort and will remain imprinted in our collective memory, especially as it coincided with the liberation of all the Saharawi prisoners. I want

to say to her that we will never forget her. I would like also to thank all associations and humanitarian organisations which have never ceased working in solidarity with the Saharawi refugees. In particular, I would like to mention the role of OXFAM which has distinguished itself by its initiatives to improve our condition, especially in this month of Ramadan.

Dear Friends,

I cannot hide from you that my satisfaction is not yet complete, for I have not yet been able to hold in my arms my son who I have not seen for 26 years. I would like to hear his voice, fill my eyes with his smile, talk with him and tell him how proud I am of him... I am certain that with your support, on a day not too far away, my dreams will be converted into reality and that we will be able to tell the world that here there is peace, here there is dignity, here nobody is in prison for his ideas or beliefs. It is only at that moment that we can say we have accomplished our mission.

Many thanks to all of you, I am proud of you.

Written in the Camp of Glaibat, El Foula, Wilaya of Dakhla, on 17 November 2001.

**N'Guia Bakay
Mother of Mohamed Daddach**



**MESSAGE FROM MOHAMED SIDI DADDACH
TO THE 27TH EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF SOLIDARITY
WITH THE SAHARAWI PEOPLE
(SEVILLE, 23-25 NOVEMBER 2001)**

I would first like to thank all the participants at the Conference as well as all those who pressed for my release and that of the other Saharawi political prisoners. To all of them, organisations, individuals, parliamentarians, lawyers, political parties, sportspeople and others who contributed to the success of the international campaign that led to our liberation, I want to express all my gratitude and recognition.

Dear Friends, I find myself again at El Ayoun after having spent more than 22 years in the prison at Kenitra, without counting two years spent in another penitentiary. Throughout all that time, I was in pain from my left shoulder, and I never received any treatment for it. I continue to suffer from great pain.

Yes, I was released on 7 November 2001, thanks to the international campaign which was launched on 1 September 2001. I then went to Smara which, like El Ayoun, lives cut off from all press coverage, under an unprecedented military blockade. The popular uprising that took place in Smara on the 17th is the tangible proof of the Saharawis' rejection of living conditions under Moroccan occupation. Currently a campaign of arrests, kidnappings, torture and repression is sweeping across the territory. In Western Sahara, dear friends, there are still disappeared people, abducted in 1975 or since by the Moroccan authorities, whose fate is unknown to this day. We ask and call on all the friends of the Saharawi people, all the international organisations, to launch a global campaign to have the truth about the fate of the disappeared Saharawis told.

Dear friends, the Sahara section of the Truth and Justice Forum has also been subject to all sorts of repression and intimidation recently. As the sole defender of human rights in Western Sahara, it is threatened with closure. Personally, as a former political prisoner, I condemn vehemently this repression and call on you to help and support the Sahara section of the Truth and Justice Forum, so that it can survive and pursue its defense of human rights in Western Sahara.

Dear friends, the Moroccan authorities prevented Danielle Mitterand from visiting Western Sahara and meeting Saharawi human rights organisations. Here is yet another flagrant example of the state of military and police siege that Western Sahara has been under since the beginning of the politico-military conflict in 1975.

Dear friends, once more I condemn strongly the repression, torture, arrests and abuses and destruction of homes of which the Saharawi citizens of Smara have been victim and I launch an appeal for the release of those arrested and for care for the injured.

Dear friends, I say to you that I reject the so-called third way, because it can never be a solution to the Western Sahara conflict. On the contrary, it may complicate it further. I appeal to the United Nations to organise as speedily as possible the referendum conceived in the UN-OAU plan, to permit the Saharawi people to exercise their right to self-determination and also to put an end to the suffering endured by them, in the occupied zones and in exile.

To conclude, I salute you and thank you for your constant support to the Saharawi people

SIDI MOHAMMED DADACH



Welcome of Mohamed Daddach in El Ayoun 10 November 2000

THE REPRESSION IN WESTERN SAHARA CONTINUES

Arrests, disappearances, torture, intimidation

Following the brutal repression of the demonstrators at Smara on 17 November last year, 15 people are still in detention awaiting trial. There are 12 Saharawis: Elmoussawi Naffi, Bahaha Sid Ahmed, Daoud Brahim, Salouk Ghali, Lakhdar Khelifa, Elidrissi Moulay Elwali, Badda Ahmed, Bouhbouss Abdelfatah, Hannani Hamdi, Mallouh Hamdi, Boussati Maalaainine and Ntaytich Sidati; and 3 Moroccans: Darif Noureddine (correspondent for the newspaper “Alaamal Edimocratie”) – freed on conditional bail on 24.01.02 – Echarkaoui Abdelhakim and Elkhalsi Elfatmi.

B

A dozen young Saharawis held overnight by the Moroccan authorities on 1 and 2 December at El Ayoun, accused of taking part in demonstrations. Their houses were searched. Eight of them appeared before the town Magistrate’s Court on Thursday 20 December. The verdict was given on Thursday 21 December. It should be noted that this verdict was not pronounced in a public hearing, but that the detainees were informed of it while still inside the civil prison. Two were acquitted. For the rest, the sentences were:

- 1 year’s imprisonment for **Shaï Mohamed** and **Elâayachi Mohamed**
- 1 year’s imprisonment for **Laghzal Essahel**, **Ezzâyaar Elhassan**, **Sghir Âaziz**, and **Elkhaldi Saïd**.

B

The practice of kidnapping and forced disappearance is still current. In fact, a young Saharawi, Mr **Abdelfatah L’kbir L’fater** (20 years old) was seized by the Moroccan authorities right in the very centre of Smara town on Wednesday 18 December, between 6 and 7 pm. He was part of a group of young Saharawis who had taken part in the celebrations in the town on the 17 November. His fate is still unknown. He may be incarcerated in the prison at El Ayoun after having been tortured.

B

The occupying Moroccan authorities are also pursuing the persecution and intimidation of Saharawi citizens of the occupied zones. Thus, on Friday 14 December in El Ayoun, Mr. Smaili Brahim, who had made his car available to Mohamed Daddach, had his driving licence confiscated and his vehicle taken to the Provincial Security HQ. Another Saharawi citizen, Massaoud Boushab Elbaz, director of the video club that reproduced the tapes of Mr. Daddach’s welcome in El Ayoun and Smara, saw his shop searched by a police superintendent and a Ministry of the Interior official. The tapes were confiscated, along with another private one. It is worth pointing out that, according to the law, video material is regulated by the Moroccan Cinematographic Centres, and that the police cannot get involved except in cases of pornography (the “vice squad”). This is thus clearly intimidation of a political character.

B

Sentencing of DANFOUR AHMED SALEM, a young Saharawi. His trial took place on Tuesday 4 December at Goulimine Magistrate’s Court (in Southern Morocco).

Recap of the facts: At the end of November, the Moroccan authorities summarily transferred Mr. ELMOUTAOIKIL MOHAMED, secretary-general of the municipality of ASSA - the heartland of the Saharawi resistance in the South of Morocco – to the town of Casablanca. As a sign of protest and their solidarity with Elmoutaoikil Mohamed, all the employees of the municipality organised a sit-in in the municipal buildings, from 9 to 4 on 26 November. The Saharawi population of the town who came to show their solidarity with the employees were dispersed by the police. Swiftly afterwards, the Royal Gendarmerie Brigade took a certain number of demonstrators in for questioning. Mr. DANFOUR AHMED SALEM, born on 7 December 1980 at Assa, was among them. He was arrested on 27 November at 9pm, and interrogated by the public prosecutor of the magistrate’s court at Goulimine, before being thrown into that town’s prison, charged with “insulting the Moroccan state”. The Magistrate’s Court condemned the young Saharawi DANFOUR AHMED SALEM to two months in prison and a fine of 1000DH. He was released from prison on 26 January 2002.

B

Hunger Strike – 131 Saharawi prisoners in El Ayoun prison (political prisoners among them) went on hunger strike from 25 December to 16 January, to demand better conditions of detention.

European Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara

Bureau Européen pour le Respect Des Droits de l'Homme au Sahara Occidental

Oficina Europea para el Respeto de Los Derechos Humanos en el Sahara Occidental

The Charter of the Bureau of Human Rights

The Bureau is an independent association. Its office is in Switzerland, in Geneva

The bureau's objectives are

- To participate in the efforts of all those who are fighting for the respect of human rights across the world
- To defend human dignity and to denounce any actions contrary to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- To denounce publicly human rights abuses in Western Sahara
- To fight for the liberation of all Saharawi prisoners of conscience
- To coordinate and service the international adoption campaign for disappeared Saharawis
- Not to let the crimes of which Saharawi citizens have been victim go unpunished

- To initiate campaigns and to support, so far as it is able, initiatives taken by individuals or groups fighting for human rights in Western Sahara, both inside and outside the territory
- To cooperate with organisations that have similar aims to the Bureau
- To strengthen contacts with human rights NGOs
- To organise demonstrations, to edit and distribute information necessary for achieving these objectives
- To promote human rights within the Saharawi population

The Bureau collates and verifies the information it receives and distributes it as widely as possible.

The Bureau edits the newsletter "El Karama – Dignity" at least three times a year, which gives news of the human rights situation in Western Sahara.

The Bureau collaborates whenever possible with Saharawi human rights organisations

The campaign of adoption of disappeared Saharawis involves sending postcards about every 2 months. Participants send a card to 4 recipients (people in authority, journalists, etc...) to ask them to intervene. If you are interested in taking part, please don't hesitate to contact us.

El Karama appears 3 or 4 times a year. To publish it we need your support:

- ÷ Become a member of our association (individuals: 30 Swiss Francs/20 Euros; organisations 50 Swiss Francs/33 Euros). Subscription to the newsletter included
- ÷ Subscribe to our newsletter El Karama – 20 Swiss Francs/14 Euros
- ÷ Support our actions financially

Surname

Firstname

Address

I want to

Become a member

Subscribe to El Karama

Give a gift

Postal cheque account: CCP 12-12461-0

Bank account: Union de Banques Suisse, 279-C3117839.0 1205 Geneve, Switzerland