



New York: May 19, 2021

Re: The Deteriorating human Rights situation in Western Sahara: Sultana Kahaya and other Saharawi activists' cases.

### **Press Release**

In the last four months, the Moroccan occupation forces have stepped up their repressive actions against Sahrawi civilians, intending to intimidate them, namely the activists and the human rights advocates. The human rights situation in the occupied Sahrawi towns has increasingly deteriorated. It is becoming a visible urgent humanitarian catastrophe in need of a rapid and decisive international community action to dissuade the Moroccan regime from oppressing the people of Western Sahara. Siege and repression remain the flagship methods adopted by the Mekhzen to intimidate the Saharawis in the occupied cities as the Moroccan authorities have imposed a blockade around the homes of many militants.

Peace and security in occupied Western Sahara have been threatened since November 19, 2020. Following the Moroccan military aggression in El Guerguerat, which ignited the war again in the region, followed by the reckless and shameful Trump's proclamation that illegally recognized the Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara allowed for such atrocities and crimes against Saharawis to occur without any punishment. In the last three months, several units of the Moroccan police have imposed a siege around the house of Sultana Khaya, in Boujdour, in occupied Western Sahara; subjecting Khaya and her family to physical and psychological abuse and torture in an effort to stop their peaceful demands for self-determination and independence for Western Sahara. Sultana, her sister, and their family are still under house arrest, and their home was raided without a warrant many times. The local authorities even confiscated their electricity meter, leaving them without access to electricity. A few days ago, Sultana Khaya and her

sister Louaira were raped by police agents using batons, their valuables were seized, and their belongings were destroyed. In addition, Three Saharawi activists, who were with Sultana for over a month under siege, were kidnapped from her house, beaten up severely and threatened, then left out in the outskirts of El-Aaiun city. The three activists are: **Labihi Babouzi, Khalid Boufrioua and Salek Babeir**. Sultana, in an interview, expressed the following: "It is a shame that Morocco is raping Saharawi women while the whole world is watching without moving a single finger as they watched the perpetrators walk away unpunished."

Simultaneously, in El-Aaiun city, *Mbarka Alina Baali, Hammadi Nassiri, Mina Baali, Salha Boutangiza, Hmad Hamamd, Hasanna Abba and Hmad Hammad* have all been attacked, beaten, and harassed because of their advocacy and activism. **Mina Baali** is still under house arrest, and her house was raided twice as the police agents stormed into her home and took many valuables, including cell phones, computers, and books. They even cut off the electricity and harassed her minor son Saad Duihi.

Furthermore, the Moroccan regime launched a defamation campaign on social media against Saharawi activists. The same regime incited the Moroccan settlers to intensify their verbal attacks on Saharawis in the occupied territory as the Saharawi protesters were waving their Saharawi flags on their rooftops. SAUSA president *Mohamed Ali Arkoukou* said in a statement: "attacking Saharawi civilians is an act of war and is a crime against humanity. The IRC has to protect the Sahrawis!".

The Sahrawis are going through an extremely difficult situation in this period. They are caught between the hammer of brutal Moroccan repression and the anvil of international laxity, for lack of international observers and the international press to report Moroccan crimes to the public opinion.

Therefore, We at SAUSA:

- Call for an urgent international investigation into these crimes against humanity committed in Western Sahara against Saharawi civilians and peaceful activists.
- Appeal to the international community to put an end to these atrocities.
- Urge the United Nations Secretariat and the UNSC to expand the mandate of the MINURSO to include monitoring the human rights situation in Western Sahara.

- Call upon the Biden government and state department to intervene

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