

H.M. King Mohammed VI
Office of the King,
Palais Royal,
Rabat,
Morocco.

Your Majesty,

I am deeply concerned following reports of the torture and solitary confinement of human rights defender, Mr Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza, who is currently being detained in Ayat-Melol prison. Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza is a member of the Tan-Tan Branch of the Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme – AMDH (Moroccan Association of Human Rights), as well as a member of the constitutive assembly of the Collectif des Défenseurs Sahraouis des Droits de l'Homme - CODESA (Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights defenders).

On 3 April 2009, Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza and nine other Sahrawi prisoners were reportedly subjected to torture in Enzkan prison. They were later transferred to Ayat-Melol prison where Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza has been placed in solitary confinement without blankets, clothes and sufficient water and sugar which he requires as he is on hunger strike.

Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza suffers from rheumatism, asthma, anaemia and other illnesses for which he spent three months in hospital while in Enzkan prison. The following day, 4 April 2009, his wife and father were refused admission to the prison and asked to bring authorisation from the Directorate of Prisons in Rabat (700kms from Ayat-Melol).

On 29 February 2008, Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza was arrested while working in his shop in Tan-Tan, South Morocco. It was believed that the arrest was related to peaceful pro-independence demonstrations that took place two days earlier in Tan-Tan. In September 2008, he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment in what was reported to be an unfair trial.

Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza has previously been the subject of intimidation. In 2004 and 2006 he was arrested by the Moroccan Military Intelligence, and in 2005 he was reportedly kidnapped by the Moroccan Military Intelligence for two weeks, during which time he was subjected to torture.

I believe that the torture and continued detention of Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza is directly related to his work in the defence of human rights. I am seriously concerned for the physical and psychological integrity of this human rights defender.

I urge the authorities in Morocco to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza, as I believe that he is being held solely as a result of his legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the detention of Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza and allegations that he was tortured / ill-treated whilst in detention, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological security and integrity of human rights defender, Yahya Mohamed el Hafed Aaza;
4. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Morocco, carrying out their legitimate work in the defence of human rights, are able to operate free of restrictions and reprisals.

Yours sincerely

