

Freedom for the SAHARAWI SIX!

On October 8, 2009, seven Saharawis were detained by Moroccan security forces at the Mohamed V airport in Casablanca upon returning from the refugee camps in Tindouf, Algeria, where they were visiting family and friends. The seven were accused of high treason against Morocco – which, according to the Moroccan penal code, can be grounds for the death penalty – and were immediately slated to be tried before a military tribunal.

One of the Saharawis, Dagja Lachgar, was granted conditional release on January 29 because of her deteriorating mental and physical health. The other six, who remain incarcerated in the prison of Sale, are:

- 1) **Brahim Dahane**, President of the Saharawi Association of Victims of Serious Violations Committed by Morocco (ASVDH);
- 2) **Ali Salem Tamek**, First Vice President of the Collective of Saharawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) and member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH);
- 3) **Ahmad Anasiri**, General Secretary of the Secretary of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Smara and President of AMDH Smara Chapter;
- 4) **Yahdih Ettarrouzi**, Member of AMDH El Aaiun Chapter;
- 5) **Saleh Lebayhi**, President of the Forum for Protection of Sahrawi Children and member CODESA and AMDH; and
- 6) **Rachid Sghayar**, Member of Committee Action against Torture.



The **SAHARAWI SIX** have been imprisoned despite the following: the **SIX** live and work in the Western Sahara, which no country nor the United Nations recognizes as part of Morocco; the UNHCR runs confidence-building programs that allow Saharawis to travel between the refugee camps and the Western Sahara to visit their families; and 11 Saharawis returned to the Western Sahara after a trip to the camps in early March and were not accused of any crime. The **SIX** were almost certainly targeted because of their human rights advocacy in the Western Sahara.

The **SAHARAWI SIX** face harsh conditions and are subjected to intimidation, racist insults, solitary confinement, and the withholding of food, water, and medicine, resulting in serious health conditions for all **SIX**. On March 17, the **SIX** announced a third hunger strike to protest their treatment and the repeated delaying of their case. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the U.S. Department of State have documented these facts and expressed concern over the inhumane treatment of the **SAHARAWI SIX** and their potential trial in a military court.

In 1979, Morocco ratified the International Covenant on Political and Social Rights, which among other provisions, states that “[a]nyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge...and shall be entitled to a trial within a reasonable time or to release”; “everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own”; and “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.” Morocco has also ratified the 1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which precludes “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is inflicted on a person for such purposes as...punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed.”

If Morocco truly believes that the Western Sahara is part of the Kingdom, then the Saharawis should clearly be allowed to come and go at will. However, while the Western Sahara is *not* part of the Kingdom, Morocco has no right to prevent its inhabitants from exiting or entering the country. Furthermore, the trial for the **SIX** has been repeatedly postponed, thus resulting in their continued detention in deplorable conditions.

Morocco claims to have made advances in the protection of human rights, but such improvements have not spread into the Western Sahara, as is blatantly apparent in the case of the **SAHARAWI SIX**. The lives of six innocent Saharawis are at stake. Morocco must prove its dedication to the protection of human rights and to the informal negotiation process being facilitated by UN Special Envoy to the Western Sahara Christopher Ross by releasing the **SAHARAWI SIX** and the hundreds of other Saharawi political prisoners it holds in deplorable conditions!