

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 25.10.10**

**MPs condemn Teenager's death as Moroccan forces open fire on Saharawi protestors**

MPs have today condemned last night's shooting in which a 14 year old Saharawi boy was killed and several others injured by the Moroccan Security Forces surrounding the Gdeim Izik protest camp in Moroccan occupied Western Sahara.

Over 10,000 Saharawi (Western Saharan) protestors moved out of cities across Western Sahara in a mass exodus on the 9th October and are living in an impromptu tented city outside El Aauin the capital of Western Sahara. Numbers in the camp are growing daily as Saharawi protestors come together to highlight the ongoing discrimination and abuse that they experience as a result of the 35 year Moroccan occupation. The Moroccan Security Forces have surrounded the camp in an attempt to prevent people from entering as well as stopping supplies of food, water and medicine reaching the camp. Several organisations including the Western Sahara Campaign have warned that this could become a major humanitarian crisis.

The boy named as Garhi Nayem was part of a group attempting to enter the camp in a vehicle when it was shot at by Moroccan Security Forces. The injured, which include his brother have been taken to the military hospital in El Aauin.

Today a delegation of MPs and Peers will raise concerns over the situation in Western Sahara with Foreign Office Minister Alistair Burt MP.

One of the group Jonathan Evans MP said this morning:

*This death is a tragedy, but there are fears this is just the beginning. The UK government can help by urgently raising the issue with the Moroccan authorities to ensure the safety of those who peacefully protest the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.*

Jeremy Corbyn MP Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara said:

*This is a tragedy and a disgrace and at a meeting I have later today with the Foreign Office Minister I'll be asking that the UK government make the strongest possible reps to the Moroccans not only to allow safe passage but also, to end the political stalemate by allowing the people of the Western Sahara the free choice to decide the future of their own land.*

Mark Williams MP said:

*I will be raising this issue with the Minister. We cannot continue to ignore the brutality of the Moroccan authorities against those who peacefully demonstrate for their right to independence. The first step is for the Security Council to implement human rights monitoring in Western Sahara*

The protest camp was timed to coincide with the visit of UN Envoy Christopher Ross who is currently touring the region. Last week he called the current impasse over

Western Sahara "untenable". He arrived in Morocco on Friday as part of the preparation for the direct negotiations between the parties in November.

The POLISARIO, the representatives of the people of Western Sahara have been warning the UN that action must be taken to prevent violence by the Moroccan Security forces against the protestors.

**Notes to editor**

1.) For photos or interviews with protestors *contact the Western Sahara Campaign +44 (0) 7931 260 420*

2.) Tensions in Western Sahara, occupied by Morocco since 1975 have grown over the last year. Despite the worsening human rights situation this April the Security Council failed to implement human rights monitoring to assess the extent of the human rights violations. MINURSO, the UN Mission in Western Sahara is the only contemporary peacekeeping mission without a mandate to monitor human rights. Human rights organisations including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have repeatedly called for this to be rectified.

3.) Western Sahara is the only country in Africa to never complete its process of decolonisation and is designated a "Non-Self-Governing Territory" under the Charter of the United Nations. It has been under Moroccan occupation since 1975 with approximately 165,000 refugees from the conflict still living in refugee camps in Southwest Algeria.

4.) The 1991 UN brokered ceasefire was based on condition of a referendum in which the people of Western Sahara would choose between independence and integration with Morocco. However, disputes over the details of the process mean the referendum has never taken place.