



## Australia Western Sahara Association

Working for justice for the Saharawi people

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### **Western Sahara Journalist, human rights advocate visiting Australia in June**

Prominent human rights defender, journalist and trade unionist **Mohamed Mayara** will visit Australia in June to speak about the plight of Western Sahara: Africa's last colony.

Mohamed will talk about the long wait for the promised United Nations referendum, the exploitation of his country's natural resources and about the repression and discrimination suffered by Saharawi people living in the territory occupied by Morocco where Mohamed has lived all his life.

"It is vitally important that countries like Australia strengthen their support for the UN's efforts to resolve the situation" said Mohamed, "The people of Western Sahara must be able to exercise their right to self-determination and be safe from human rights abuses. We should also be able to benefit from the exploitation of the natural resources of our country."

Mohamed is a co-founder of the independent media collective Equipe Media, which documents the systematic violations of international humanitarian law under Moroccan rule and reports them to international organisations. He has spoken in many countries about the human rights situation in Morocco and the importance of the UN referendum.

The Australia Western Sahara Association (AWSA) together with Union Aid Abroad Apheda, will be hosting Mohamed's tour. For opportunities to hear Mohamed see the tour program at [awsa.org.au](http://awsa.org.au) To interview him see the contacts below.

#### **Dates and contacts:**

Adelaide: 4-6 June: AWSA Victoria Convenor, Ron Guy 0428 173 970

[auws.victoria@gmail.com](mailto:auws.victoria@gmail.com)

Melbourne: 7-14 June: AWSA Vice President, Georgia Vlassopoulos 0425 702 975

[gv-@netspace.net.au](mailto:gv-@netspace.net.au)

Sydney: 16-22 June: AWSA Secretary, Lesley Osborne 0439 363 010

[osbornelesley@gmail.com](mailto:osbornelesley@gmail.com)

Canberra: 23-26 June: AWSA Victoria Convenor, Ron Guy 0428 173 970

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Date: May 2024

Backgrounder follows

## Backgrounder

### More about Mohamed

Mohamed Mayara is a dedicated Sahrawi activist committed to advocating for the rights of the Sahrawi people. While in Australia, Mohamed will talk about the repression and discrimination suffered by Saharawi people living in the territory occupied by Morocco where Mohamed has lived all his life. Mohamed's father disappeared when Mohamed was young and Mohamed himself has been persecuted, arrested, tortured and unfairly dismissed from jobs.

Mohamed is co-founder and coordinator of the Sahrawi independent media team (Equipe Media) committed to raise awareness about the situation in Western Sahara. Since 2005, Equipe Media has become a reliable source of information for numerous international media outlets and human rights organisations.

Mohamed is proficient in multiple languages, including Arabic, French, and English. He has a bachelor's degree in history and civilization, graduating with honours and was a high school teacher from 2010 to 2015.

### The Western Sahara conflict

Africa's last colony: Western Sahara was a Spanish colony until 1975. On the withdrawal of Spain, and the International Court of Justice issuing a verdict that Morocco had no rights over that Territory, the Mauritanian and Moroccan armies mobilised to occupy resource-rich Western Sahara. This led to bloody conflict with the indigenous Sahrawi, led by the Polisario Front, which ended with Morocco annexing most of the region.

The guerrilla war continued until a 1991 UN-brokered ceasefire, which included a proposed, but not delivered referendum, on independence. Over 170,000 Saharawi have lived in forced exile in the Algerian desert for over 40 years, where the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) is based. SADR is recognised by over 80 countries and the African Union. Hostilities resumed in 2020 after Morocco violated the ceasefire agreement.

### The occupation

#### ***Freedom of Expression and Media***

Freedom of expression is severely restricted, with strict control over information and frequent persecution of independent journalists. Morocco prevents most international journalists and observers from entering the territory.

#### ***Human Rights and workers' rights***

In the Moroccan-occupied territories, human rights abuses are very concerning. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch document arbitrary detentions, torture, and unfair trials of Sahrawi activists. Moroccan authorities suppress trade unions and labour rights activities, creating a repressive environment for workers advocating for better conditions.

***Exploitation of natural resources*** Western Sahara's natural resources, such as phosphates, fish and agriculture are key factors in the conflict. Morocco's exploitation of these resources, often without Sahrawi consent, violates international norms.