

Copenhagen, 16th of May 2019

To the Honourable Mr. Mustafa Ramid, Minister of State for Human Rights, and to the Honourable Mr. Mohamed Auajjar, Minister of Justice,

We call upon the Minister of Justice and Liberties, Mr. Mustafa Ramid, to stop the trial regarding the Sahrawi media and human rights activist Nazha El Khalidi. The trial is set to begin on May 20th 2019 in El Aaiún, but the charges against El Khalidi are based on problematic grounds which violate basic principles of human rights and freedom of speech.

El Khalidi has been charged by the Moroccan authorities after filming and live-streaming a peaceful protest in the city of El Aaiún in the occupied territories of Western Sahara on December 4th 2018. It was a peaceful demonstration in support for the renewed peace negotiations in Geneva between the Polisario Front and Morocco facilitated by the UN. El Khalidi was filming for four minutes before Moroccan police attacked her, beat her, stole her phone and took her into custody. Following this, the Moroccan government charged El Khalidi with “professional usurpation” for not having a journalism degree. We together with several other international human rights organisations perceive this charge as an excuse and a means to oppress the voices of Sahrawis and other voices who are critical of the policies being pushed forward by the Moroccan government. We simultaneously believe that the national law in which these charges are based, is in violation of international human rights law, and correspondingly, that no criminal case should follow.

We, as part of the international community, are worried that the outcome of this case will punish El Khalidi for exercising her constitutional rights to the right to freedom of expression and prevent many others from exercising their rights in the future. Moreover, the fact that El Khalidi has been convicted for documenting violations of human rights is highly worrying since it - no matter the outcome of the trial - will discourage other human rights activists, journalists, and media activists from documenting and reporting on the human rights violations taking place and socio-political challenges in Morocco and the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara.

We call upon the minister and the Moroccan government to stop the systematic harassment and crackdown on civil society, journalists and human rights activists in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara. Precaution should be taken not to discriminate against the Sahrawis, the people of Western Sahara. We call upon the Minister and the Moroccan government to withdraw the charges against El Khalidi. We call upon the Minister and the Moroccan government to release all political prisoners in Moroccan jails. We call upon the Minister and the Moroccan government to respect freedom of speech and assembly and to work towards ensuring a democratic space for all citizens, in which they can participate politically and exercise their human rights.

We call upon the Moroccan government to live up to their commitments as members of the UN and the AU, by promoting and protecting the human rights of the people of Western Sahara, regardless of political beliefs as well as promoting popular participation and good governance.

Yours Sincerely,

Global Aktion, Denmark
Ulla Sandbæk, MP for the Alternative Party, Denmark
Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara, Norway
Emmaus Stockholm, Sweden
Fellesrådet for Afrika, Norway
Praktisk Solidaritet, Sweden
Youth of the Socialist People's Party, Denmark
Social Liberal Youth, Denmark
Afrikagrupperna, Sweden