



/EL KARAMA/

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN WESTERN SAHARA: THE NEXT STEP BEGINS

The Bureau for human rights in Western Sahara needed to give itself the means with which to become a legally-recognised structure, so that its members could have a new instrument of struggle. This was therefore done on the 16th March, when a new association was formally created, currently uniting members from numerous countries, including Switzerland, France, Italy, UK, Spain ... and Western Sahara. Small yet ambitious, this association will work with all sister associations, especially Saharawian, to achieve its goals: not only denouncing violations of human rights in Western Sahara, but also leading proactive campaigns for the respect of these same rights.



**Demonstration for the Disappeared in front of
the UN
Geneva, March 2002**

The positive results of last year's campaign for the release of Saharawi political prisoners are promising, although the association's members have not developed any illusions as to the ease of future campaigns. In fact, each new struggle will demand extremely detailed preparation, the collection of the maximum possible quantity of evidence (on disappearances, for example) and lots of support from NGOs and other recognised organisations. One can hope, for example, that as the Bureau is a legal entity in Switzerland, the entry of Switzerland into the UN will make it more proactive, ready to take the lead in a situation where human rights are treated with contempt.

El Karama will stay as the information organ of the Bureau, and its translation and international distribution will carry on as before. It is also clear that, to be effective, our campaigns must be yours also, ours all together. Over the coming months we will continue to ask for your help with far-ranging actions that can't succeed without your solidarity. Thankyou for responding to our appeals and for continuing your collaboration with the International Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara, in this new stage in the struggle.



GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN WESTERN SAHARA COMMUNIQUE

The general assembly of the European Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara was held on the 16th March in Geneva. Representatives from Switzerland, France, Italy and Great Britain were present; representatives from Germany and Spain sent their apologies. There was also a large group of Saharawi human rights defenders present: Mr Abdeslam Omar Lahcen – President of AFAPREDESA (Association of Families of Saharawi Prisoners and Disappeared), from the refugee camps, and representatives of organisations from the Western Sahara under Moroccan control: Mr Dahha Rahmouni, of the Co-ordinating Committee of Saharawi Victims of Forced Disappearance, and Mr Moumen Mohamed Mahmoud, of the Smara Association of Families of the Disappeared, son of Sidi Ahmed Baaya, still disappeared, were joined in the afternoon by Mr Noumria Brahim of the Truth & Justice Forum – Sahara Section, and Mr Mohamed Fadel Leili, Saharawi lawyer and former disappeared.

The Assembly also received several messages of support, from Belgium (Pierre Galand, President of EUCOCO), from France (Committee for the Adoption of Political Prisoners in Morocco), ...

This meeting, which discussed and accepted the proposals for modifying the functioning of the Bureau, can be considered as a Constituting Assembly for the new association. After having reported on the activities of the past year, it adopted statutes, elected an executive committee of 5 members and appointed contact persons for the different countries present. Furthermore, to widen its perspective, especially outside of Europe, the Assembly decided unanimously to change the name of the association to *INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR THE RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN WESTERN SAHARA*. A subscription campaign will be launched shortly.

The work plan adopted involves the pursuit and development of

- the spreading of information, in particular in different languages (French, English, Spanish)
- the publication of El Karama (in French, English, Spanish, Italian, Catalan, ...)
- the campaign for the adoption of disappeared Saharawi
- advocacy for the release of all Saharawi political detainees sentenced by the Moroccan authorities or awaiting judgement.

A specific campaign will be launched in the next few weeks on the issue of forced disappearance in Western Sahara. As part of this, a project for a meeting between families of Saharawi disappeared and European “adopters” in Geneva in March 2003 has been drawn up.

Saluting the active participation of Saharawi representatives, the Assembly reaffirmed its support for the Saharawi organisations for the defence of human rights and its wish to pursue an effective collaboration with them.

In the afternoon, the assembly listened with emotion to Mohamed Daddach, who addressed the meeting by phone. After having thanked BERDHSO for the campaign for his and his comrades’

release, he noted that violations of human rights in Western Sahara were linked to the politico-military conflict and wouldn't cease until this conflict was ended with a free and fair referendum of self-determination. Other phone messages were received from the Western Sahara, from a Saharawi woman escaped from the Moroccan secret prisons, and from a human rights activist.

In the second part of the day, a colloquium on forced disappearance took place, involving also Mrs Tina Meschiati, survivor of forced disappearance in Argentina (1976-78), from the association "Memoria Viva", and Mr Jairo Sanchez of the American Association of Jurists. This meeting of over 3 hours (which is the subject of a separate report) will greatly enrich our future actions.

Geneva, 17th March 2002



Saharawi Participants with Tina Meschiati.

Speech delivered by telephone to the General Meeting of BERDHSO
Geneva, 16 March 2002

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

It is with pride and great emotion that I address your general meeting so that I can express my warmest greetings and my deepest respect. I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks and my great satisfaction for all the actions undertaken by your Organisation in favour of my liberation and that of my comrades, the other Saharawi political detainees.

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

Our unconditional release was the fruit of an international campaign launched last year by your Organisation and which Saharawi human rights defenders joined and was actively supported by the Saharawi population and by humanitarian celebrities throughout the world.

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

Hundreds of Saharawis still remain in forced disappearance in secret Moroccan gaols and subjected to the most barbarous methods of both physical and psychological torture. We need to mobilise ourselves now to conduct the struggle to establish the truth on their fate through the launch by your Organisation of a an international campaign for this.

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

Human rights abuses in Western Sahara are linked to the political-military conflict which the region has suffered for a quarter of a century. These abuses will only stop with the end of the conflict. The only way to put an end to the conflict is through the organisation by the UN of a free and fair referendum of self-determination and through it to allow the Saharawi people to express themselves free of all constraints, on the definitive political status of Western Sahara.

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

Finally, I send my warmest greetings to you my friends, and through you to my great friend, the activist, Christian Viret, President of BERDHSO. My best wishes for the success of your work in the General Meeting. Thank you.

SIDI MOHAMED DADDACH

With a significant international participation, in particular with the presence of representatives of different NGOs active in the field of human rights in the occupied territories, the results of the General Meeting of the former BERDHSO were exceptional. Aiming for greater effectiveness the bureau has now become international. In keeping with this new aspect, the structure has been enlarged and various projects of work established. Also exceptional were the contributions by Mohamed Daddach, Mrs Tina Meschiati (Memoria Viva) and Mr Jairo Sanchez (American Association of Lawyers), who gave a sense of common commitment.

Mohamed Bennou

I found this general meeting was particularly successful because of the presence of our friends from Western Sahara who enabled us to understand even better the human rights situation and its development in this territory occupied by Morocco for 26 years. Their arrival was a very emotional moment which moved up a notch with the telephone communication we had with Mohamed Daddach. To hear this voice that they tried in vain to silence. I can still see Ramouni setting out delicately the little identity photos of the disappeared commenting : "this young man was 15, he died next to me in prison" . We must have so much respect for these men and women, and such a duty to get them out of prison, and to know the fate of those who have not survived.

Michèle Decaster (Paris)

Colloquium on forced disappearances

.....Your neighbour is a torturer ...

Publish the list of torturers, give out the civil status of your torturers, their current jobs, their addresses, unmask those who think that impunity is the order of the day. ...

A half-day of study followed the General Meeting of the International Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara (BIRDHSO) on 16 March last. This was a particularly important moment, where it was possible to look at the actions which are taking place today on this subject in the occupied zones of Western Sahara, in the Saharawi refugee camps and in all the places where the subject of forced disappearance in Western Sahara is tackled. To lead our in-depth studies, we were able to count on two Latin American friends : Tina Meschiati, survivor of disappearances by the Argentine Junta and Jairo Sanchez, a lawyer.

Bring the evidence together

The discussion showed the importance of testimony : testimony of former disappeared which Tina Meschiati calls *Survivors*, since the conditions of the life of disappeared people could have led to their death at any moment. Testimonies are indispensable to give an account of the conditions of abductions, detention, of arbitrary justice which surrounds forced disappearance. There is therefore an urgent need to collect these testimonies from survivors ; in Western Sahara there are those who were released in 1991, through international pressure, after 16 years of disappearance and who can describe the conditions of their abduction, their survival in places of detention, give the names of their torturers, without forgetting the details which enable cross-checking and a new understanding of the policies of states whose stability rests on disappearances. Testimonies of families of disappeared who can describe the life of their disappeared relatives before their abduction, who can replace them in civil society and counter the allegations which could be circulating about them. Even if they had independence imprinted on their hearts, no justification could absolve those who made them disappear, who wanted to remove them from the world of the living without trial.

Gathering testimonies

With our Latin American friends, who have been able to make disappearance a two-edged weapon which can turn against their persecutors, we have taken stock of the work of remembrance which needs to be started in Western Sahara before we can launch a campaign for the liberation of all the

disappeared. It is a painstaking task to undertake : to gather individual testimonies which can enable us to show the systematisation of the process and prove that disappearance, in Morocco, was, and is perhaps still, a practice of the government. In this connection, testimonies -particularly those concerning women and children - take on a special meaning and raise awareness among the most sceptical.

Lodging complaints

In the name of universal justice, the Moroccan authorities must be questioned about their infamous practices, complaints must be lodged, complaints which accuse by name those responsible and demand trials to take place. The notion of universal justice enables us to bring complaints against torturers outside their country of domicile, as Judge Garçon was able to do in the case of Pinochet. When will there be a complaint from disappeared Saharawis? Lawyers are ready to launch themselves into this new and long legal battle.

The time of action follows that of thought, and after the meeting in March, we must now prepare a rigorous programme aimed at the objectives we need to achieve, organise with Saharawi human rights organisations the collection of testimonies and draw up the modes of public debate on forced disappearance, aiming with precision and certainty not only at the commanders but also those who executed the orders.

Sharing experiences on the 16th broke down barriers, in this case between Latin American and Africa, and the example of the determination of the Latin American survivors and their strategies for intervention are precious for the Saharawis who are seeking – with us – the most appropriate ways to combat forced disappearance and impunity. Engaged in this new challenge, we will take up the slogan that the Mothers of the Place de Mai exported to the whole world :

“Until we find them!”

BIRDHSO MEMBERSHIP CAMPAIGN

Our association needs new members so we can manage to do our work and achieve our aims.

The last General Meeting decided to start an international membership campaign aiming to give us the means of functioning : 100 members paying their subscription would allow us to cover the annual budget of BIRDHSO.

Please join the BUREAU INTERNATIONAL POUR LE RESPECT DES DROITS DE L’HOMME AU SAHARA OCCIDENTAL. Make its work known and its newsletter EL KARAMA, published in French, English, Spanish and Italian.

Send in the form below by post, fax or email to our address.

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Request for membership of the International Bureau for the Respect of Human Rights in Western Sahara		
NAME and FIRST NAME:	or	ASSOCIATION
Address :		
Country :		
Tel/fax/email :		
Signature :	Subscription : individual 30FS/20Euros Organisation 50FS/33Euros	
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SOLIDARITY WITH SAHARAWI DEFENDERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

For many years, Saharawi defenders of human rights have been condemning the serious human rights abuses which result from the politico-military conflict in Western Sahara. The Moroccan state has made itself guilty of flagrant abuses against the Saharawi civil population. The actions taken have thus challenged the tight control of the media, the security and the military imposed on the Saharawi territory. This is why the Moroccan authorities multiply threats and intimidations to Saharawi human rights defenders. They are constantly under surveillance, spied on, harassed. Often they are summoned by different organs of repression and taken to centres where they are interrogated and intimidated. To take an example, Messrs MOUTIK ELHOUCINE and MAYARA MOHAMED SALEM from the Forum for Truth and Justice (Sahara branch), Messrs RGUIBI MOHAMED LAHBIB and GAOUDI MOHAMED FADEL of the Daddach committee were held in the judicial police premises, and the judicial brigade of the royal gendarmerie of Laayoune. Several Saharawis including Messrs DIMAOUI ABDLESSALEM, BENNASSER and EL MOUSSAOUI DKHIL are accused of being the leaders of protest demonstrations which were organised in the towns of Smara and El Aaiun, in November 2001. Many families have been threatened with reprisals if their sons or daughters continue their activities for human rights. Young people are also targeted by this policy of terror which the Moroccan forces are implementing with complete impunity.

The Moroccan authorities are still refusing to issue passports to human rights defenders. This is notably the case with Messrs TAMEK ALI SALEM, SIDI MOHAMED DADDACH and Mrs HAYDAR AMINATOU. It should be recalled that many Saharawis were forbidden from leaving Moroccan territory. The most significant case is that of Messrs ELHAMED MAHMOUD and NOUMRI BRAHIM at the time of the 57th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, while confiscating their documents and submitting them to heavy interrogation.

Other defenders have been transferred to Moroccan towns to distance them from the territory of Western Sahara, reducing them to silence. Thus Messrs ELMOUTOIKIL MOHAMED, HMAD HAMDAD and ABDEDDAIM MOHAMED were deported to inside Morocco. Others are simply dismissed in an abusive manner, which is the case of Mr MOUTIK ELHOUCINE, president of the Forum for Truth and Justice – Sahara branch as a punishment for his participation in the meeting with the European Parliamentary ad hoc delegation on Western Sahara. Thus Mr GAOUDI MOHAMED FADEL is still without a job. The authorities make numerous threats to sack other Saharawi human rights defenders.

New sentences

On Wednesday 24 April 2002 in front of the El Ayoun Court of Appeal the trial took place of the detainees from the bloody riots in Smara in Western Sahara on 17 November 2001. This trial was postponed on several occasions.

After over 4 hours of deliberation, the tribunal gave its verdict.

• *Two years' prison for : disobedience, use of force against the public forces, deliberate burning of public transport vehicles, deliberate burning of a non-residential premises, carrying weapons, destruction of public transport vehicles and destruction of documents belonging to public forces.*

**SALOUKI ALI born in 1981 in Smara, *NTITICH SIDATI born in 1961 in Smara. *ELIDRISSI MOULAY ELWALI born in 1981 in Smara *ELKHALDI ELFATMI « Moroccan » *BAHAHA SID AHMED, born in 1975 in Tan Tan. *ELMOUSSAOUI NAFI, born in 1979 in El Ayoun. *DAOUD BRAHIM, born in 1982 in Smara. *BADDA MOHAMED SALEM, born in 1972 in Smara. *MALLAH SID AHMED*

• *Six months' prison and 500 dirhams fine for : disobedience, use of force against public force and for carrying arms.*

**CHARKAOUI ABD ELHALIM, Moroccan *LAKHDAR LKHLIFA, born in 1971 in Ben Sliman.*

**BOUHOUSS ABD ELFATAH, born in 1984 in Goulimine. *ELBOUSSATI MALAININE, born in 1969 in Smara. *HANINI HAMDANI born in 1977 in Tan Tan.*

• *Acquittal for : *ELFATER ABD ELFATTAH, born in 1976 in Smara. *AFIF ALI DARIF NOUREDDINE « Moroccan journalist».*

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