

News Service: 068/99

AI INDEX: MDE 29/02/99

12 April 1999

Morocco: Compensation and amnesty are positive steps but concerns remain

Amnesty International welcomed today the official announcement of plans to release political prisoners and to award compensation to relatives of at least 65 of the people who “disappeared” between the 1960s and 1980s.

“This is another concrete step towards fulfilling Morocco’s international human rights obligations” AI said, “though there are still important human rights concerns of the past and present that need to be addressed”

Those qualifying for compensation are the relatives of at least 65 individuals (of the list of 112 cases of “disappearances” examined since 1998) who are acknowledged to have died in secret detention at the hands of the security forces. Yet the list is incomplete. “We have repeatedly called on the government to investigate the issue of over 500 people – most of them Sahrawis – who “disappeared” after arrest in the mid-1970s and remain unaccounted for”, Amnesty International said.

“Hundreds of former ‘disappeared’ people released in 1984 and 1991 -- who continue to live in precarious circumstances -- should receive compensation,” the organization added. “The families of those who died in detention should also be compensated and the circumstance of such deaths should be clarified.”

Some 300 “disappeared” Sahrawis who were released in 1991 -- after up to 16 years in secret detention -- remain virtually cut off from the world and some have died in suspicious circumstances. In addition, the Moroccan authorities have failed to officially recognize the death of some 50 “disappeared” Sahrawis who died in secret detention centres in Agdz, Qal’at M’Gouna and Laayoune between 1976 and 1991.

To date the full details of the beneficiaries of compensation or the names of prisoners to be released have not been made public.

“We are expecting this amnesty to include all remaining prisoners of conscience -- most of whom are sentenced for ‘offending members of the royal family’, which carries up to five years imprisonment,” the human rights organization said.

“The amnesty is a welcome step, and we hope that this will be followed by changes in the existing legislation, so that no person can be imprisoned for the non-violent expression of their opinions.”

Background information

Hundreds of Moroccan and Sahrawis “disappeared” at the hands of the Moroccan security services between the early 1960s and the late 1980s. In December 1984 six Moroccan “disappeared”, were released from the secret detention centre in Qal’at M’Gouna after 10 years’ “disappearance”. In June 1991 some 300 Sahrawis were released from the secret detention centres of Qal’at M’Gouna and Laayoune after up to 16 years’ “disappearance”. At the end of 1991 some 30 Moroccans were released from the secret detention centre of Tazmamert after 18 years’ disappearance. Some 50 Sahrawis and some 30 Moroccan “disappeared” died in secret detention between 1976 and 1991 in the secret detention centres of Agdz, Qal’at M’Gouna, Laayoune and Tazmamert. To date their bodies have not been given back to their families, who have been seeking information on their place of burial in vain.

In October 1998, the *Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l'Homme* (Consultative Council for Human Rights), CCDH, a body appointed by King Hassan II, issued a list of 112 cases of "disappearances" announcing that death certificates would soon be issued to the families of 56 "disappeared" who had died. However, this recent announcement has increased the number of acknowledged "disappeared" who died to at least 65 people, but not given the names yet. and that 28 political prisoners would be released. In October 1998 28 political prisoners - including possible prisoners of conscience - were released.

On 9 October 1998 King Hassan II announced that he had given orders for the authorities to implement the recommendations of the CCDH and to solve all outstanding human rights dossiers within the coming six months.

Amnesty International welcomes the progress made to address these issues in recent years and hopes that further effective measures will be swiftly carried out to ensure that all past injustices are conclusively resolved. The organization also hopes that concrete action will be taken promptly to deal with its other outstanding concerns in Morocco. These include cases of death in custody and torture, the continued forcible exile of Abraham Serfaty, the continued house arrest of Abdessalem Yassine and the application of human rights safeguards contained in national and international legislation.

Prisoners of conscience still detained in Morocco include Abderrahmane El Ouadoudi, sentenced in 1995 to five years imprisonment for participating in an unauthorized demonstration and "offending members of the royal family".

ENDS.../