

**WESTERN SAHARA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WELCOMES THE RELEASE OF SIX PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE**

Amnesty International welcomes the recent release of Kelthoum Ahmed Labid El-Ouanat and five other Sahrawi prisoners of conscience.

They had been adopted as prisoners of conscience by Amnesty International, and members of the organization around the world had been campaigning for their release, particularly in the last few months.

Kelthoum Ahmed Labid El-Ouanat, a 24-year-old woman from Smara in Western Sahara, and five other youths were serving 20 year prison sentences imposed by the Moroccan Military Court in July 1993. They had been arrested between October 1992 and May 1993, following pro-independence demonstrations in Smara and other towns in Western Sahara, and had been accused of threatening the external security of the state. After arrest they were allegedly tortured during illegally prolonged incommunicado detention and subjected to an unfair trial.

“The release of these prisoners of conscience is a significant and encouraging measure for the improvement of human rights in Western Sahara,” Amnesty International said today.

The organization hopes that other measures will be taken by the Moroccan authorities to bring about further improvements in the human rights situation in Western Sahara. Amnesty International’s outstanding concerns in Western Sahara include the lack of information about hundreds of people who “disappeared” after arrest since the 1970s and who remain unaccounted for.

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