

Morocco: The "disappeared" reappear

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**"DISAPPEARANCES" AND POLITICAL KILLINGS:
HUMAN RIGHTS CRISIS OF THE 1990s**

A MANUAL FOR ACTION

Chapter C-6

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@The "disappeared" reappear**

Pre-Publication Version

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Chapter C-6

Morocco: The "disappeared" reappear

Hundreds of suspected government opponents, including over 500 people of Western Saharan origin (Sahrawis) and over 100 Moroccans, have "disappeared" since the 1960s after being arrested by the Moroccan security forces. In 1991, after being held in secret detention for up to 19 years in appalling conditions, more than 300 of these prisoners were released after an international campaign on human rights violations in Morocco. The authorities had persistently denied holding any of the "disappeared". This chapter discusses the phenomenon of "disappearance" in Morocco and assesses some of the factors, including the Amnesty International campaign, which, in 1991, led to the releases of some of the "disappeared".

In some countries "disappearance" is often followed by extrajudicial execution: even if the "disappeared" remain alive for a couple of years, they tend, eventually, to be executed. In Morocco a state of "disappearance" can be ended after weeks, months or years, or it can amount to decades-long secret detention with no prospect of release. The "disappeared" are held in secret centres: villas in residential areas, secret police facilities, isolated farms, former military camps or barracks, and ancient fortresses - *qsour* - found even in the most remote areas of the interior.

Those who were released, after months or years of incommunicado detention, rarely dared to speak out on their experiences. Most of the 300 released in 1991 are kept silent by the fear of returning to the limbo of "disappearance". However, some of those released in 1991 and a very few released earlier have spoken of their experiences. This chapter is based partly on their testimonies.

The 1991 release of more than 300 of the "disappeared" was only a partial victory. More "disappeared" - perhaps several hundreds - remain in secret unacknowledged detention. Those who were released and who remain in the country are still restricted in their movements and their freedom of expression. Most of them lack medical attention and they have never received the compensation which is their due. In addition, no one has ever been brought to justice for ordering or being involved in a "disappearance".

"Disappearances": the system

Known "disappearances" in Morocco go back to the early 1960s.

- Mohamed Ben Ali Boulahia Tati, a political activist, was arrested in Casablanca by police in early 1963, but his arrest was never acknowledged. He was seen by a fellow-detainee in Dar al-Mokri, a villa in Rabat used as a secret detention centre, in April 1963. There has been no news of him since. For 30

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years his wife has continued to seek information about her husband from the Moroccan authorities, but they deny knowledge of him. He remains "disappeared".

- Abdelhaq Rouissi, a trade union activist, "disappeared" in October 1964. No one saw him arrested, but traces of blood were found in his bedroom. In the 1970s various sources, including released "disappeared" prisoners, confirmed that he had been arrested and held for years in secret detention. His family is convinced he is still alive and continues to struggle for his release.

- In 1965 Mehdi Ben Barka, the leader of the opposition *Union nationale des forces populaires*, was kidnapped while in France by Moroccan secret service officers; he is believed to have been murdered a few days afterwards. A French court found the Moroccan Minister of the Interior, General Mohammed Oufkir, guilty of ordering his abduction. His death is admitted at the highest level - but no official inquiry has ever been made into his fate.

- Another kidnapped trade union leader, Houcine El Manouzi, "disappeared" while in exile in Tunis in 1972. Three released "disappeared" prisoners have testified that Houcine El Manouzi was held with them in Rabat from 1973 to 1975, when they had escaped together and been recaptured. Where he is now is not known. His family has campaigned for 20 years for his release.

The greatest number of "disappearances" have been of people of Western Saharan origin. Over 200 were reported "disappeared" in the year after Morocco annexed the Western Sahara in November 1975. The full number of those "disappeared" is not known. Amnesty International believes that, including short-term "disappearances", over one thousand Sahrawis have "disappeared" after arrest over the last 15 years. Some were released after months or years of incommunicado detention, more than 300 were freed in June 1991, but up to 500 may remain in secret detention.

Hundreds of the "disappeared" remain unaccounted for. Some families continue, year after year, to make the rounds of prisons and to write to the authorities. The Moroccan Government denies knowledge of them just as, for years, it denied secretly detaining the "disappeared" who were eventually released in 1991. Amnesty International believes that the majority of the "disappeared" may still be alive, hidden away in secret cells, on an isolated farm, or in a villa in a smart quarter of Rabat.

Some may be dead. The names are now known of 48 Sahrawis detained in secret centres who died between 1976 and 1990.

In the remote barracks of Tazmamert a slow death in darkness and isolation was part of the punishment. By the time of the 1991 releases, 31 out of 58 military men taken in 1973 to this secret prison died. This group, not strictly "disappeared" as the Moroccan Government never denied holding them, were taken from Kenitra Central Prison in 1973 and vanished into Tazmamert, a prison, whose existence, right up to the release of its inmates, was denied by the authorities. Even in September 1991, the month when the detainees were transferred from Tazmamert, the Moroccan Minister of the Interior stated on the radio that "Tazmamert only existed in the minds of evildoers".¹

Occasionally those who have "disappeared" over the years have been set free. One member of the auxiliary forces who "disappeared" in 1973 was discovered doing forced labour on a remote farm in 1979; students who vanished in 1976 were released without warning or explanation in 1984; other students who "disappeared" in 1981 were freed in 1983 and 1984. Those released in 1991 included the "disappeared" wife, cousin and six children (the youngest only three years old when imprisoned) of a former Minister of

¹ [French original: "Tazmamert n'a existait que dans les esprits malfaisants"]

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the Interior, General Mohamed Oufkir, who died in mysterious circumstances in 1972; more than 300 Sahrawis who "disappeared" between 1975 and 1987; and three brothers who "disappeared" in 1973, who were first held in secret villas in Rabat and then virtually buried alive in Tazmamert. Twenty-seven members of the armed forces (all who were left alive out of the 58 transferred there in 1973) were also released from Tazmamert in 1991.

But those who reappear from "disappearance" are never wholly free. They are told to forget what happened and never to talk about it. Their movements are restricted and their communications monitored. If they talk to outsiders about their experiences they risk rearrest. As one Sahrawi former "disappeared" said, they exchange a lesser prison for a greater one. Only a few, mostly those who have managed to leave the country, have been able to talk about the time they were "disappeared".

One purpose of "disappearance" is to imprison - or eliminate - people against whom the state has no legal charges or has charges which it is unwilling to pursue in a court of law. But "disappearance" as used in Morocco has had, as a further consequence, the creation of an atmosphere of fear which spread through the country. For the family of the victim, "disappearance" may be a greater punishment than execution: death ends the matter, grief heals, life resumes. "Disappearance" punishes a whole family forever - or as long as the "disappearance" lasts, for, since the authorities never admit to holding a "disappeared" prisoner, the family do not know what has happened and whether their relative is alive or dead.

Most cases of "disappearance" were perpetrated during periods when the Moroccan state was perceived to be in danger from internal opposition (not only the *coups d'état* of the early 1970s, but also serious opposition from opposition parties, trade unions or local rebels) and the Sahrawi opposition in the late 1970s. But the practice of "disappearance" may be continuing. Sahrawis detained in Qal'at M'gouna state that, up until the beginning of 1991, new wings were being added on to the secret detention centre and names are known of Sahrawis who have been arrested since January 1992 who are still held in incommunicado detention, "disappeared". The 11 villas said to hold "disappeared" prisoners in a radius of 50 kilometres around Rabat are still believed to be in use.

Routes in "disappearance"

Various routes seem to followed in "disappearance" cases. Some "disappearances" are temporary, and the "disappeared" person is released after a few months or years. Sometimes "disappearance" is clearly intended to last forever.

Temporary "disappearance" can be seen as an extension of the legal procedure of keeping the suspect for interrogation for a certain number of days in *garde à vue* (incommunicado) detention without contact with lawyers, doctors and family. In the 1970s *garde à vue* was sometimes illegally prolonged for over two years, during which the detainees had no contact with their families, who were never informed where they were held. Illegal prolongation of *garde à vue* remained frequent throughout the 1980s.

Some Moroccans suspected of being opponents of the government, who should have been brought to court, appeared to drop out of the system for months or years, their whereabouts being unknown even to their families, before being released or brought to trial. One place where detainees were held incommunicado for long periods was the detention, interrogation and torture centre of Derb Moulay Cherif in Casablanca. For Sahrawis "disappearance" appeared to be "normal": only very rarely did the authorities bring before the courts any Western Saharan suspected of opposing Moroccan rule or supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Seguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro, known as the

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Polisario Front.

Recent testimonies of some of those released after "disappearance" over the last 10 years show that, for many, it was clear from the beginning that a special procedure was in operation: they were abducted by armed men with no semblance of legality, taken at once to a secret centre, saw no one clearly attached to any normal police force, and never had the impression that they were being interrogated for any *procès verbal* (police statement).

Some branches of the security forces may hold "disappeared" prisoners without notifying other services. The *Forces armées royales* (FAR), Royal Moroccan Army, usually hands over civilians arrested during its operations to one or other of the police forces. Intelligence forces, which often carry out the same tasks in competition with each other, include the *Direction de la surveillance de territoire*, Office of Territorial Surveillance (under the Minister of the Interior and involved in many "disappearance" cases), the *Renseignements généraux*, General Intelligence, which has the power to arrest suspects and operates from police stations, but is not known to practise "disappearance", and the *Direction générale des études et documentation*, the General Office of Research and Documentation, which has one division under the direct control of the King and another branch under the prime minister. Though technically controlled by the FAR, the *Gendarmerie royale*, Royal Gendarmerie, is in practice directly supervised by the King. Its size and equipment was expanded to counterbalance the army, which was implicated in the 1971 and 1972 coup attempts.

The *Corps mobile d'intervention*, Mobile Intervention Corps, is cited as both guarding and transporting "disappeared" prisoners. There are also said to be "parallel" security services, operating in plain clothes, with a direct chain of command to the Minister of the Interior or loyal officials of King Hassan II, who carry out secret and unacknowledged activities.

The *makhazini* (a local auxiliary force) frequently guard the "disappeared" in the rural areas. Testimonies of released "disappeared" prisoners who had been held in outlying provinces describe visits by provincial governors to detention centres guarded by *makhazini*. There is little doubt that, although probably not involved in ordering "disappearances", governors condone and collaborate in the imprisonment of scores of people for decades in secret unacknowledged detention.

Recent testimonies suggest that the reasons for "disappearance" include suspected or actual political opposition activities; disloyalty by state servants, especially those involved in secret services (*makhazini* guarding the "disappeared" Oufkirs who smuggled out letters for the family themselves "disappeared"); and sometimes as a result of involvement in secret financial dealings or as a consequence of personal rivalries. Another member of a family, or even a whole family might be detained and "disappear" as a result of the "crime" of one member. This was the case of the Oufkir family, and the family of the first Polisario prime minister, Mohamed Lamine Leili, 11 of whose relatives were arrested and "disappeared".

Although food and living conditions are sometimes bearable, this has not been the norm. The Bourequat brothers, released in 1991, said that after an initial period of torture they were fairly well treated while in secret detention between 1973 and 1981 in various Rabat villas. But for many, including the Bourequat brothers after 1981 when they were moved to Tazmamert, semi-starvation in appalling conditions appeared to be part of the punishment. This was the case at Tazmamert where about half the inmates died over a period of 17 years; at Qal'at M'gouna (where about 300 Sahrawis were held, some for over 15 years) until 1985, when conditions improved somewhat; at Agdz (where Sahrawis and 10 Moroccans were held till 1983); and at Ain Jdid where the Oufkir family were detained between 1977 and 1987.

A 1989 letter from Tazmamert described the "infernal prison of Tazmamert" where detainees had "been

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buried up to now, without even the rights enjoyed by beasts, totally isolated from each other and from the outside world". The "Complex" in Casablanca, in contrast, where 10 "disappeared" prisoners, including five students, were held for 18 months, bound, blindfold and lying on the floor, as regards food was "a five-star hotel. We received yoghurt, apples and bananas brought from the Avicennes Hospital next door. We even grew fatter. But at Agdz we lost all these reserves in the first week". Detainees at Qal'at M'gouna described how the dogs were fed before the detainees; it was their leftovers which were passed to the "disappeared".

Some prisoners could not bear the conditions of detention and went out of their minds. A detainee in Tazmamert who told a guard, in 1974, that he had been sentenced to three years was told: "Don't say three, say forever". One of those detained in Tazmamert, after 18 years of darkness and isolation, is known to have committed suicide. Sergeant Mimoun Fagouri hanged himself on 1 June 1990, fifteen years after the expiry of his sentence. He called to those in neighbouring cells: "I am weary. The only way out of Tazmamert is by death". Two of the Sahrawis released in June 1991 had gone mad; so had a Lebanese, detained in secret for over 12 years and left in Qal'at M'gouna when the Sahrawis were freed. His fate and that of a Libyan, also detained there, remains unknown.

Pressure for change

In 1981 Group 214 of Amnesty International's Dutch Section began working on behalf of El Bechir (Abdi)ould Labbatould Mayara, born in 1937, taking over the case from Dutch Section Group 56. From 1981 the group wrote about 400 letters to King Hassan, the Minister of Saharan Affairs, other government ministers, prisons, hospitals, human rights organizations, local authorities, headmasters, mayors, and the Moroccan Ambassador. Letters were also written by Leiden town councillors and over 1,000 postcards were sent.

In 1982 two identical replies were received from the Moroccan Ministry of Justice stating that "the person cannot be found on any prisoner lists...searches made by the Ministry have yielded no result". One prison only replied to say that "Mayara is unknown here..."

Abdi Mayara was one of the more than 300 Sahrawi "disappeared" who were released in June 1991, over 15 years after his "disappearance" on 3 February 1976.

Amnesty International has campaigned on "disappearances" in Morocco since the early 1970s through work on cases by groups and in a major campaign on Morocco in 1982 (when "disappearances" were raised and letters smuggled out of Tazmamert were given wide publicity for the first time). Moroccan students who "disappeared" for between one and three years in the 1980s, for example, were the subject of urgent appeals while both Moroccan and Sahrawi prisoners were the object of long-term action by Amnesty International groups. One Moroccan who "disappeared" in 1972, Houcine El Manouzi, was "adopted" by Amnesty International and his case assigned to a group in 1975, while between 1977 and 1981, 88 Sahrawi "disappeared" were "adopted" by groups.

Over the next 12 years Amnesty International groups, like Dutch Section Group 214, wrote thousands of letters and postcards on behalf of those who had "disappeared" with minimal response. Between 1981 and 1991, Group 64 of Amnesty International's German Section sent over a thousand letters and postcards on behalf of Heibaould Omarould Mayara, the cousin of Bechir Mayara, and one of the first to be arrested and "disappear" a few days after the annexation by Morocco of the Western Sahara in November 1975. They received a standard reply from the Ministry of Justice, and nine prisons returned letters

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marked "unknown".

In July 1991, when the first, handwritten list of the Sahrawis who had died was received, it was learned that he had died on 28 September 1977 at Agdz. A fellow "disappeared" prisoner described his death:

"The same day [as another detainee died] Heiba was dead in his cell...The whole prison caught an illness, only one person didn't get it, we called it the "sickness of the knees". It attacked all the lower body and led to paralysis. It began by black spots on the soles and the whole foot became dry and later you couldn't move. You had diarrhoea. One of us had studied medicine, he was a student and he said the illness was due to lack of vitamin B12, it was a disease of malnutrition..."

A number of solidarity groups of Moroccan or Sahrawi exiles or sympathizers worked actively from the late 1970s in many countries, mostly in Western Europe, for the release of the "disappeared". They included the *Association de parents et amis du disparus au Maroc* (APADM), Association of Relatives and Friends of the Disappeared of Morocco, and the *Asociación de familiares de presos y desaparecidos saharauis* (AFAPREDESA); both organizations compiled lists and details of the "disappeared".

Many of the cases of those later released, as well as of those still "disappeared", were raised by families or non-governmental organizations (including Amnesty International) with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances ("Working Group on Disappearances"). Thus, for example, the report of the Working Group for 1983 referred to the "disappearance" of the three Bourequat brothers, who had been arrested in 1973:

"In a letter dated 20 June 1983, the Government of Morocco informed the Working Group of the results of its investigations. With regard to the reported disappearance of three brothers who were said to have been arrested on the same day at their home, the Government stated that the records of the courts, the Ministry of Justice and the prisons had been searched, but that no record of criminal charges or of any other judicial procedures regarding the brothers had been found. In the Government's view, they should be sought outside the country".¹

On 30 December 1991 the three Bourequat brothers were at last released from over 10 years in appalling conditions in Tazmamert and over 18 years' "disappearance".

Until 1991 only a few, sporadic releases occurred to sustain the hopes of campaigners - for example the release between 1984 and 1986 of a group of 12 students "disappeared" in 1983.

Difficulties in campaigning on Moroccan "disappearances"

For the world it was often difficult to believe that people could still be alive in a secret cell after "disappearing" for 15 years or more. Part of the difficulty was the shortage of information. To be sure that a "disappearance" has been perpetrated, the victim needs to have been seen to have been arrested by the security forces - preferably by more than one witness - and the government must have been asked to account for the arrest and have denied holding the person. A clamp-down on information from the Western Sahara made it almost impossible to get this sort of information. The climate of fear meant that even a family might not ask after its "disappeared" members. There were hundreds of reports of "disappearances" between 1975 and 1987 in the Western Sahara; on very few did Amnesty International have information on when, how and by whom the person was arrested, and in even fewer, details of family and life before arrest.

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The 88 cases "adopted" by Amnesty International groups in 1977-80 were put before the UN Working Group on Disappearances in 1988, but the Working Group deemed only two of the cases admissible. Interestingly, the two cases deemed admissible were the only ones subsequently shown to have been of prisoners who "disappeared" only temporarily. One had then been released, the other had been brought to trial, sentenced to four years' imprisonment, and released in 1981 (he was part of a group known as the "Meknes" group, the only group of Sahrawis Amnesty International knew of who, after six months' "disappearance" in secret centres, then went through a normal legal process and were brought to trial).

The reappearance of one of these two released prisoners was discovered by Amnesty International and reported to the Working Group. Although it was later confirmed that he had been released in 1981, the Amnesty International group working on his case had written letters on his behalf for eight years without receiving information on his release from the Moroccan authorities. The case was then used extensively by the Moroccan Government to suggest that Amnesty International's information was bad in every other respect, and that all of the others who had allegedly "disappeared" had probably also come out of detention and were living happily elsewhere, perhaps under different names. They suggested that the fluidity of the Saharan name structure had helped to confuse Amnesty International; the youth who had "disappeared" and been subsequently tried as Mustapha Lahna had reappeared as a lecturer in Rabat University Department of English as Mohammed Tamek. Moroccan authorities also stressed Sahrawi nomadism to suggest that those "disappeared" were probably in Mauritania or the Polisario camps around Tindouf, Algeria.

At the centre of Amnesty International's 1990 report "Morocco; 'Disappearances' of people of Western Saharan origin" (see below) were the case studies of 27 Sahrawi "disappeared", with details of who they were, the circumstances of their "disappearance" - and the affirmation that the Sahrawi "disappeared" were still alive. The evidence for this assertion included a testimony from a Moroccan, released after a period of "disappearance", who had been in the forts of Agdz and Qal'at M'gouna with Sahrawi prisoners until 1984.

In the summer of 1990 Amnesty International received supporting evidence, in the testimony of a former guard at Agdz and Qal'at M'gouna, who described guarding the "disappeared":

"They got given vegetables, lentils and beans, but they weren't properly cooked. Squashes too. There were guard dogs too, at the qsar. They gave the same food to the prisoners as to the dogs, exactly the same thing, the same mess-tin. Most of them had no clothes. When they went to the latrines they wrapped blankets around themselves out of modesty.

"As these were special prisons we often beat them, in turn, sometimes for five minutes, sometimes for a quarter of an hour. It was tiring for us too. They'd get out into the yard for a short time and we'd tell them that's where they'd be buried, in that yard. We'd even hang out white shroud material so that they could see it from the yard, to bring it home to them...

"During the years I was there, it was always like that, night and day. No visits, no books, no radio, waiting for death... I stayed until 1983. I met someone not long ago who said it was still the same, except that some were dead... "

In addition, the family of one Sahrawi "disappeared" received letters that had been smuggled out: Amnesty International did not mention this in its report, as the family feared that the source of letters might dry up, but it enabled the organization to pinpoint the secret centre in Laayoune where their relative was kept and to be sure that most of those detained there were still alive.

Other factors also encouraged silence:

- **"Quiet diplomacy versus publicity"**. When incontrovertible evidence was obtained that people such as the Oufkir family and the military prisoners of Tazmamart were secretly detained by the government, the off-the-record message from those close to the government was always that these people were likely to be released, *as long as no publicity was given on their cases*. Pressure against publicity was applied, not only on the families of the "disappeared", but also on foreign governments and Amnesty International. The US Department of State, for example, appears to have been persuaded to keep silent for years over the one Tazmamart prisoner of concern to it, M'Barek Touil, who is married to an American citizen, and to exert any pressure on the Moroccan Government completely without publicity. Some pressure was certainly exerted and from 1985 M'Barek Touil, sentenced to 20 years in 1972, was given better conditions: he was allowed to correspond with his wife - a heavily censored correspondence which said nothing about his surroundings - but no public statement on his situation was ever made and his place of detention was not revealed. Other Western governments were similarly discreet.

- **The families' fear**. One of the chief difficulties in campaigning is that "disappearance" may force the family into the conspiracy of silence. There is a fear for the safety of the person "disappeared" as well as of reprisals against other members of the family. As one relative of a "disappeared" prisoner said before Amnesty International's 1991 Morocco campaign: "For myself, I don't mind. But suppose that in a month or six months a cousin dies in a road accident - I'll never be sure whether that was really an accident or my fault for speaking out."

Internal forces for change

Morocco has three principal human rights movements, two of which, the *Association marocaine des droits de l'homme* (AMDH) and the *Ligue marocaine des droits de l'homme*, work together in a coordinating committee. The third, the *Organisation marocaine des droits de l'homme* (OMDH), was founded as a non-party organization, reflecting different currents.

The human rights movement was becoming more active and vocal after 1988, its demands reflected in the pages of the press and supported by some opposition political parties and trade unions. An outspoken press and human rights organizations raise questions of torture and political imprisonment with a vigour not found in many other countries in the region. Political prisoners freely answered letters from Amnesty International groups as well as writing numerous communiques about prison conditions or internal and international political questions which were published in newspapers. But a major difficulty in the campaign against "disappearances" was a conspiracy of silence (with a few notable and courageous exceptions) about the "disappeared", until relatively recently, within Morocco. The freedom of expression in Morocco does not extend to the institution of the monarchy (for instance by calling for a republic or criticizing the King), the integrity of the nation (for instance, by suggesting that the Western Sahara should be offered self-determination) or Islam. These restrictions on free speech are reflected in the constitutional provision that grants immunity to members of parliament but lifts that immunity when "the opinions expressed challenge the monarchical system, Islam or constitute an insult to the King".

The silence from families, former "disappeared" prisoners and the news media was - and still is - a most important part of the success of the use of "disappearance" by the Moroccan government as a means to eliminate political opponents. Usually "disappearances" have been regarded as part of the royal prerogative, that is, an issue beyond criticism and strictly not to be mentioned.

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This has not been true of all "disappearances". Some of the cases of Moroccans suspected of political opposition or students who "disappeared" were mentioned, but rarely, by a few courageous Moroccan newspapers. Other "disappearances" in cases which had followed direct threats to the King, such as attempted coups where people's "disappearance" may have been presumed to have been ordered by the King, were for a long time never mentioned publicly within Morocco.

Protest against "disappearance" by the families of Sahrawi "disappeared" prisoners was even more muted as Sahrawis were more closely watched and more liable to suffer arrest and "disappearance" for speaking out than Moroccans. One description of how arrests were made was given by a young Saharan exile in Spain:

"This is what they do. They come at night normally, straight to the house of the person [they are after]. Several police dressed as locals enter and take him away on a stretcher, after making him bathe in his own blood. In the morning the families go to the commissariat and inquire about him, and the only reply they get, standard for everyone, is 'If you ask again, you'll disappear [yourself]'..."

The ban on speaking openly was also imposed on foreign journalists and usually accepted by them. When King Hassan was interviewed by French journalists for the French television channel *Antenne 2* in December 1989, the same boundaries were drawn. In particular, the interviewers were ordered beforehand not to mention the Oufkir family, and, though one interviewer made a reference to "certain children", they obeyed.

This silence at last began to break in December 1990 when the families of some of the Tazmamert prisoners wrote a petition to certain ministers, including the Ministers of the Interior and Justice, calling for the conditions of their relatives to be investigated and for those who had completed their sentences to be released. Copies were sent to political parties and newspapers. The trigger for the petition was a batch of letters smuggled out of Tazmamert which reached some prisoners' families in November 1990, making them fear that if they did not speak out now it would be too late.

At the same time another letter, a vivid description of Tazmamert written in 1989, was posted anonymously in December 1990 to a number of people and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International. This letter was published first, in French translation, by the *Association de défense des droits de l'homme au Maroc*, the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Morocco, a Moroccan human rights group based in Paris. It provided the first information that the Bourequat brothers were alive and held in Tazmamert. The knowledge of the heightened awareness of Moroccan events in the international arena strengthened the readiness first of families, and then of Moroccan journalists and human rights groups to speak openly of things which had previously been unmentionable.

Tazmamert was raised in Parliament in December 1990 by the leader of the *Organisation de l'action démocratique populaire* (OADP), Organization of Democratic Popular Action; his question was reported in the OADP newspaper *Anwal* and taken up by other papers sympathetic to the *Union socialiste des forces populaires*, Socialist Union of Popular Forces. In February 1991 the Oufkir family were released and only then were they mentioned in a Moroccan newspaper.

In May and June 1991 Tazmamert and the Oufkirs were openly mentioned in conferences and communiques of the OMDH, the AMDH and the *Association de jeunes avocats*, Young Lawyers' Association. A dossier on Tazmamert was published in a small leftist opposition newspaper, *Hurriyat al-Muwatin*, Freedom of the Citizen.

External forces for change

The timing of Amnesty International's campaign on human rights violations in Morocco was made more effective by external forces which coincided with the campaign, but which themselves gained in importance because they happened in a situation in which human rights in Morocco had become high on the agenda, both internally and internationally.

A visit by an Amnesty International delegation to King Hassan in February 1990, and the subsequent publication of a report, "Morocco; Human rights violations in *garde à vue* detention" (February 1990), contributed to this. This report drew international attention to facts which had been exposed by local human rights movements. In its next report, "Morocco; 'Disappearances' of people of Western Saharan origin" (November 1990), Amnesty International, in reporting on the Sahrawi "disappearances", raised questions which could not be raised by activists in the country.

Factors in the changing international situation included:

- The publication in France of *Notre ami le roi*, Our Friend the King, by Gilles Perrault in September 1990. The book received enormous publicity, partly because of the adverse reaction from the Moroccan Government, which rather clumsily tried to stop publication and then bought up an entire edition. This publicity fed back into the human rights movement as well as popular feeling in Morocco, where copies were smuggled in. It also raised consciousness in France, causing Morocco to cancel plans for a program of events there celebrating Morocco's history and culture. It was less important outside Francophone countries as it was not, during the next year, translated into other languages. However, its popularity in France meant that, for a time at least, France, the staunchest supporter of the Moroccan Government, felt obliged to put pressure on Morocco to take some action on human rights concerns.
- Pressure from the Human Rights Committee set up under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("International Covenant"), which started consideration of Morocco's periodic report on its implementation of the Covenant in November 1990 (for a description of the work of the Committee, see Chapter G-6). For the consideration of Morocco's report, numerous human rights groups submitted information to the Human Rights Committee. Most of these groups were based in Europe and the US, but they included the OMDH - the first time an Arab human rights organization had presented a report to the Human Rights Committee on its own government. Amnesty International, according to its normal practice, also made available a summary of its concerns, its report on *garde à vue* detention in Morocco, and a report on "disappearances" which was to be made public the same month.

During the session of the Committee the question of the "disappeared" was raised quite strongly. When the Moroccan representative said, in answer to questions about the Oufkirs, that this was within the royal prerogative and an internal matter, Committee members told the Moroccan delegation that Morocco's ratification of the International Covenant placed such questions within the competence of the Human Rights Committee.

Eventually the delegation capitulated and apologised; it recognized the competence of the Committee, but said it did not have the information to reply to their questions; Tazmamert and Qal'at M'gouna were not on any lists of prisons. The members of the Committee did not complete consideration of Morocco's report, and specifically asked the delegation, among other things, to return with information on Tazmamert and Qal'at M'gouna.

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This meeting showed the potential for publicity on Human Rights Committee discussions. Because of growing international interest in human rights concerns in Morocco, the Committee's sessions began to receive publicity in the West. The text of the discussions was also serialised in one of the Moroccan daily newspapers.

- The UN-sponsored settlement of the problem of the Western Sahara in June 1990, which was moving towards the first stage of implementation in the summer of 1991 (the ceasefire was scheduled for 6 September). The settlement envisaged an amnesty for all political prisoners and was almost certainly a factor in the releases of Sahrawi "disappeared" prisoners in June 1991.

Other external forces for change should not be ignored. One such force is the heightened awareness of human rights throughout the world. In 1990 and 1991 this was reflected in influential news media such as Radio France International (to which many Moroccans listen including, reportedly, King Hassan II), which covered a number of human rights stories every day. At the same time new human rights organizations were being founded in many African countries. In neighbouring Mali a military government fell to be replaced by a government headed by the leader of the newly-formed human rights movement.

Evaluation of Amnesty International's campaign

Amnesty International's campaign on Morocco provides an example of the interweaving of internal and external pressures for change. External pressures on the Moroccan Government, for which Amnesty International was responsible for only a small part, clearly increased the confidence of a growing and increasingly outspoken internal human rights movement. Some external pressures, such as that generated by Gilles Perrault's book, were coincidental to Amnesty International's campaign, while others, such as those stemming from the Human Rights Committee discussions and the Western Sahara settlement, were taken into account when planning the campaign and influenced the focus of the papers Amnesty International published.

The dimension added by Amnesty International's campaign was the international force of a human rights movement which could not only flood Moroccan authorities with thousands of letters a day from people in every continent, but also had influence with governments and intergovernmental organizations throughout the world. Visits by Amnesty International sections to Moroccan embassies in their countries were important and the pressure by governments, when exercised, supported Amnesty International's demands. Amnesty International groups in other Arab countries played a particular part in the campaign. In the European Parliament, where concerns over human rights violations in Morocco had been raised for years, Amnesty International's information was quoted in speeches and resolutions.

The timing of the releases of Moroccan and Sahrawi detainees may help to identify some of the most significant pressures:

- The release of the Oufkir family came in February 1991, a month before the launch of Amnesty International's campaign (though the campaign's timing was almost certainly already known in Morocco), but five months after the publication of Gilles Perrault's book and an intensive campaign by human rights groups based in France.

- The releases of more than 300 Sahrawi "disappeared" occurred as moves were being made to implement the UN settlement over Western Sahara and three weeks before the session of the Human Rights Committee to continue consideration of Morocco's report in July 1991.

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- The transfer of the 30 surviving detainees from Tazmamert took place in September 1991. In August 1991, a number of non-governmental organizations spoke before the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities to call for the release of the prisoners of Tazmamert. Amnesty International had extended its campaign for a further three months shortly before, issuing a news release to mark the anniversary of the transfer of detainees to Tazmamert on 7 August 1973.
- Pressure from the United States was also clearly important; the emptying of Tazmamert in September 1991 and the release of three long-term political prisoners in Kenitra Central Prison in January 1992 came in each case just before visits of King Hassan to the United States. The Tazmamert prisoner who was married to a US citizen was released before the others.
- The actual releases of most Tazmamert prisoners (after medical treatment) took place in October 1991 around the time of the final session for consideration of Morocco's report to the Human Rights Committee.
- Lobbying by members of a European Parliament delegation visiting Morocco in December 1991 was said to have led to the release of the Bourequat brothers.

The importance of Amnesty International's part in the releases of the "disappeared", even though other pressures played a significant part, cannot be discounted. All the releases came immediately before or during the organization's campaign, and those released included prisoners featured in the campaign. They included 24 of the 27 "disappeared" prisoners mentioned in the case studies published in "Morocco; 'Disappearances' of people of Western Saharan origin". Moreover, the centres from which the "disappeared" were released were those mentioned with corroborative detail in Amnesty International reports: Tazmamert, Qal'at M'gouna and Laayoune. Former "disappeared" prisoners in Qal'at M'gouna reported that they were told in March that Amnesty International and other organizations were campaigning for them and they were going to be released.

The future

More "disappeared" prisoners have been released in Morocco than campaigners dared to hope for. But hundreds more are still unaccounted for. Forty-eight Western Saharans and 30 detained Moroccan military men have died in custody, but the Moroccan Government has not even officially informed their families of their deaths. New information suggests that Amnesty International has consistently underestimated the numbers of Moroccans who may, at one time or another, have "disappeared" after detention. There is much still to be done to address the problems of the still unresolved "disappeared".

Other Sahrawi and Moroccan "disappeared" prisoners in other centres still to be effectively exposed have not been released. Although some of those who have not been released are those on whose behalf Amnesty International has been campaigning for years, like Houcine El-Manouzi, often they are people on whose cases Amnesty International has had only scanty information. New information, which has confirmed sightings in secret centres of some of these missing people, like Abdelhaq Rouissi, should help.

No one can now deny that the "disappearances" described in Amnesty International's reports and appeals were substantiated. The Moroccan Government itself has now issued a "List of the persons originating from the Sahara reprieved by His Majesty King Hassan II following the request of the members of the Advisory Council for the Saharan Affairs". But though Moroccan authorities have been shown to have

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held people in secret incommunicado detention in sometimes appalling conditions for over 15 years, the Moroccan Government has largely avoided the worldwide condemnation such practices deserve. When the Bourequat brothers were released, after these French citizens' 18 years' unacknowledged detention without charge or trial, 10 of them in Tazmamert, there was no remonstrance for past injustice when President Mitterrand of France publicly thanked Morocco for their release.

Internally there may never be any inquiry into what has happened. Like other ex-"disappeared" in Morocco, the recently reappeared prisoners have been stifled by continuing government intimidation and restrictions. Those who were released from Tazmamert were told, before they were released, to forget that Tazmamert ever existed and never to talk about their experiences. The released Sahrawis are closely watched and effectively harassed to prevent them from talking. However, for the sake of human rights in Morocco, the campaign for a full inquiry should be continued.

Today, more Moroccan families are ready to speak out about "disappeared" relatives and more information has been gathered on how "disappearance" is organized within Morocco. Moroccan human rights movements have published lists of the Moroccan "disappeared". But the silence within Morocco on the Sahrawi "disappeared" has not been broken. There are political constraints on local activists who might be expected to speak out on their behalf inside Morocco. However, it is clear that open discussion within Morocco on the fate of the "disappeared" must be the next step as Moroccan human rights activists come to accept that "disappearance" can only be stopped if it is opposed whoever the victim and whatever the circumstances.

Postscript

In April 1993 Amnesty International issued another report on "disappearances" in Morocco and Western Sahara, "Morocco; Breaking the wall of silence: the 'disappeared' in Morocco". In May 1993 Amnesty International delegates visited Morocco to discuss the organization's concerns with the *Conseil consultatif des droits de l'homme* (CCDH). This official government-appointed human rights body accepted that there had been "disappearances" in the past and stated that they wished to "turn a page". Amnesty International discussed at length 17 cases with the CCDH and has since sent lists of other people believed to have "disappeared". Amnesty International urged the CCDH to intervene for the release of all those who remain "disappeared".

Notes

iUN Commission on Human Rights, 40th session, Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, UN document No. E/CN.4/1984/21, 9 December 1983, paragraph 135.