

## **Morocco: recent announcements for human rights improvements are welcome but further government action is needed to deal with past injustices**

The decision by the Moroccan authorities to recognize the deaths of more than 50 people who had "disappeared" at the hands of the security forces and died in secret detention between the 1960s and 1980s is an important and positive step, Amnesty International said today.

The human rights organization is also welcoming the government's announcement that it will free 28 political prisoners and examine the cases of "disappeared" people whose fate remains unknown.

However, the organization is concerned that, two weeks after these decisions were informally announced, the Moroccan authorities have still not provided any details concerning the identity of the "disappeared" who have died.

"The agony of the families of the 'disappeared' whose death in secret detention has been confirmed must not be prolonged; they have the right to know when, where, and how their loved ones died," Amnesty International said today.

The organization is further concerned about the relatively small number of "disappearance" cases which the new government of Prime Minister Abderrahmane Youssoufi appears to be addressing.

"We have repeatedly called on the government to investigate the issue of over 500 people – most of them Sahrawis – who "disappeared" after arrest by the security forces in the mid-1970s and remain unaccounted for," the organization said. "The Moroccan authorities must take immediate steps to clarify the fate of each of these "disappeared" people."

The organization is also concerned that the former "disappeared" who were released in 1991 have received no compensation and many continue to live in precarious circumstances.

Some 300 Sahrawi "disappeared" 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 more than 50 "disappeared" Sahrawis who died in secret detention centres in Agdz, Kalaat M'Gouna and Laayoune between 1976 and 1991.

Amnesty International is urging the authorities to provide adequate compensation to all former disappeared and to the families of those who died in detention, and to protect the rights of all former "disappeared".

### **Background information**

In a press conference on 12 October 1998, the *Conseil Consultatif des Droits de l'Homme* (Consultative Council for Human Rights), CCDH, a body appointed by King Hassan II, announced that death certificates would soon be issued to the families of 56 "disappeared" who had died, adding that other cases which could not yet be clarified would continue to be studied and that 28 political prisoners would be released. However, the CCDH did not give the names of the dead "disappeared", nor those of the political prisoners to be freed. These information had already been informally announced two weeks ago. 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.

During a visit to Morocco last June, Amnesty International's Secretary General, Pierre Sané, presented a memorandum detailing Amnesty International's concerns and recommendations to the government. He stressed that "a Morocco where human rights are respected cannot be built unless all the "disappeared" and prisoners of conscience still detained are released, and unless the impunity enjoyed by those responsible for crimes and torture is ended".  
ENDS.../