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## **Morocco must investigate killing of 14-year old Sahrawi at protest site**

Amnesty International is calling on the Moroccan authorities to immediately investigate the fatal checkpoint shooting of a 14-year old boy outside a camp set up by Sahrawi protestors.

According to his relatives, Al-Nagem Al-Qarhi was shot dead on 24 October by Moroccan military officers, while in a car bringing supplies to a camp set up by Sahrawi protestors demanding an end to their economic marginalization by the Moroccan government.

“The disturbing details of this killing that must be investigated immediately and transparently”, said Amnesty International. “Morocco needs to show that it has not violated UN standards on the use of firearms, or used excessive force as it chokes off access, supplies and communications to the Sahrawi protest camp.”

Al-Nagem died almost immediately after being shot in the kidney at close range by Moroccan military forces as he sat in a car with six others at a checkpoint, the victim’s sister Sayida has told Amnesty International.

The Moroccan Ministry of Interior has claimed that the car “attacked a checkpoint”, and that the checkpoint was fired on, but from another vehicle. Family members say the passengers were seated when they were shot, and that they were bringing supplies to relatives living in the protest camp.

The other passengers in the car with Al-Nagem were also injured in the shooting, and then beaten by Moroccan police, according to Sayida’s testimony. The surviving victims were transferred to a military hospital in the nearby city of Laayoune, where they were found handcuffed to their beds when family members visited them the next day. One has since been detained, and two taken in for questioning.

According to his family, Al-Nagem was buried the next evening by the Moroccan authorities, who have refused to allow his mother and siblings to see the body or tell them the location of the burial site.

The Moroccan military has kept a heavy presence around the camp, established on 10 October by Sahrawis who left the city of Laayoune and other Western Sahara cities en masse to demand improved job opportunities and housing.

Today a group of about ten Spanish journalists were prevented from entering the camp by the police. Last week, Moroccan officials are reported to have used batons and teargas to prevent over a hundred people travelling in cars from reaching the camp with supplies.

Amnesty International has called for the respect of Sahrawi protestors’ right to freedom of assembly and warned that no excessive force should be used to disperse protestors, in a letter addressed last week to the Moroccan Minister of Interior.

## **Background**

Since 10 October 2010, thousands of Sahrawis have collectively left Laayoune to set up a camp in the desert about 10-13 kilometres east of the city. Some Sahrawi human rights defenders say that the camp population has reached the tens of thousands; official sources reported that there were 5,000 people last week in the camp.

Western Sahara is a territory contested between Morocco, which annexed it 1975, and the Polisario Front, which calls for its independence and runs a self-declared government in exile in the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria.