

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 29/11/97

UA 403/97 "Disappearance" / Fear of torture / Possible
prisoners of conscience

22 December 1997

MOROCCO / WESTERN SAHARA Abderrahman Brahim Atman
Mohamed El Yaddassia

Abderrahman Brahim Atman and Mohamed El Yaddassia are reported to have "disappeared" after being arrested on 10 December 1997 in Bir Gandouz, in the south of Western Sahara, by members of the Moroccan security forces. Amnesty International fears they may be facing torture or ill-treatment in secret detention.

The two men were reportedly arrested for their support of the *Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguia el Hamra y Río de Oro* (Polisario Front), a movement seeking the independence of Western Sahara. Their families have no information concerning their whereabouts or legal status.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During a United Nations-sponsored meeting in Houston, USA, in September 1997, the Moroccan Government and the Polisario Front agreed on a code of conduct during the referendum on the international status of Western Sahara scheduled to take place in December 1998.

The agreement allowed the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) to resume the identification of voters in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara and in the refugee camps which are under the control of the Polisario Front in Tindouf, in the south of Algeria.

However, neither the recent agreement nor MINURSO's current mandate offer any guarantees that human rights will be respected during the period preceding the referendum. In spite of MINURSO's presence in Western Sahara since 1991, dozens of alleged or suspected supporters of the Polisario Front have been arrested and held in secret detention by the Moroccan authorities during which time some have reportedly been ill-treated and tortured.

For more information on the human rights situation in Morocco / Western Sahara, please refer to the Amnesty International report "Human rights violations in Western Sahara" (MDE 29/04/96, April 1996).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, French, English or your own language:

- calling for the whereabouts of Abderrahman Brahim Atman and Mohamed El Yaddassia, arrested on 10 December 1997, to be made known immediately;
- seeking assurances that they are being protected from any form of torture or ill-treatment, and urging that they be allowed immediate access to their families, lawyers and independent medical assistance if necessary;
- urging that they be immediately and unconditionally released if they are held for the non-violent expression of their beliefs.

APPEALS TO:

1) Minister of the Interior
M. Driss BASRI
Ministre de l'Intérieur
Ministère de l'Intérieur

Quartier Administratif

Rabat, Morocco

Telegrams: Minister Driss, Rabat, Morocco

Telexes: 36731

Faxes: +212 7 76 20 56/76 64 89/76 68 61

Salutation: Excellence/Your Excellency

2) Minister of Justice

M. Omar Azziman

Ministre de la Justice

Ministère de la Justice

Rue Beyrout

Rabat, Morocco

Telegrams: Ministre Azziman, Rabat, Morocco

Faxes: +212 7 738 940/723 710

Salutation: Excellence/Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

The president of the Consultative Council for Human Rights (Official Human Rights Body):

M. Driss Dahak

Président du Conseil Consultatif des Droits d l'Homme (CCDH)

Place des Chouhada, B.P. 1341

Rabat, Morocco

Faxes: +212 7 726856

and to diplomatic representatives of MOROCCO accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 10 February 1998.