



Ms Federica MOGHERINI

High representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy

Brussels, 14th of July 2017,

Madam High Representative,

On the 6th of July of 2017, the 14 Sahrawi political prisoners known as the “Oudaya (Marrakesh) students” were convicted to sentences ranging from 3 to 10 years of the prison. Another two prisoners are still pending sentences, while a third one was released in May 2017, after over a year in jail.

The proceedings were related to the death of Omar Khalek, during the protests that followed the repression of a non-violent seating protest by Sahrawi students. The protests had been convened to denounce the passivity of Moroccan authorities after a brutal attack against Lazar Yahia, a Sahrawi student in Marrakesh, by a group of Moroccan students.

During the first trimester of 2016, in this aftermath of this event, some 12 Sahrawi students and activists were detained. This group spent over 501 days in jail without trial, in violation of Moroccan law, as the trial was postponed over 12 times before it could start on the 9th of May 2017. During this time, the detainees participated in several strikes to denounce acts of torture and ill-treatment, none of which were investigated by Moroccan authorities. This issue was raised several times by the EU in its political dialogue with Morocco¹, to no effect, raising important concerns on the violation of human rights by Moroccan authorities.

According to international observers, the sentence is based solely on oral declarations that the prisoners have repeatedly declared to have been falsified and obtained under torture. These accusations were not investigated, in a clear violation of the United Nations Convention against Torture, to which Morocco is party.

Moreover, all of the Sahrawi students were known as engaged activists against institutional racism in Moroccan universities. Indeed, there are no universities in the Occupied Territories of Western Sahara, and Sahrawi students are forced to attend faculties in Morocco though -contrary to Moroccan students- they are not entitled to supplementary scholarships for this displacement². Moreover, several careers (such as Medicine and other scientific courses) are not accessible to Sahrawi students.

The group of detained Sahrawi students were also active participants in peaceful demonstrations for the right to self-determination of the Sahrawi people, which are violently suppressed by the Moroccan authorities. On these grounds, the political nature of the trial is undeniable.

¹ Cf. Written questions E-008073-16, E-003354/2016, E-009110-16.

² This constitutes an evident violation of the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural rights by Morocco.

We, as Members of the European Parliament, express our solidarity with the “Oudaya students” group and demand your intervention to ensure that:

- The above-mentioned sentences are annulled, as the right to a fair trial has not been respected;
- That all allegations of torture be investigated and the perpetrators of such acts be held accountable;
- The fundamental rights of all Sahrawi political prisoners are upheld and that the EU Delegation in Rabat meets with these prisoners and monitors any future court proceedings
- Sahrawi students and human rights defenders are allowed to engage in peaceful demonstrations for their universal right to an education and to the self-determination of the Sahrawi people;

Sincerely yours,

Jytte GUTELAND (S&D)

Paloma LÓPEZ BERMEJO (GUE/NGL)

Ivo VAJGL (ALDE)

Bodil VALERO (VERTS/ALE)

Fabio Massimo CASTALDO (EFDD)

on behalf of the Western Sahara Intergroup.