

1 October 2021

Western Sahara: Woman human rights defender assaulted, intimidated and threatened by Moroccan authorities

On 25 September 2021 woman human rights defender **Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire** was harassed, threatened and intimidated by Moroccan police at her residence in El Ayoun, Western Sahara. The woman human rights defender had a meeting scheduled with members of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement at her house to discuss the support they could give to woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya, [who is currently under de facto house arrest](#). The Moroccan police, who were in both official uniforms and plain-clothes, attacked the members of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement as they were making their way to the meeting, before assaulting Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and damaging her property.

[Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire](#) is a prominent woman human rights defender in Western Sahara. She is a member of Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement, and is active in the El Ayoun human rights community. As part of her human rights activities, she participates in peaceful demonstrations which call for the right to self-determination. In addition, she advocates for the freedom of Sahrawi political prisoners and organises workshops in support of their families.

On 25 September 2021 Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire had scheduled a meeting for 3PM at her residence for members of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement to discuss the case of woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya, who has been under de facto house arrest since November 2020. At around 2:45PM, the residence and roads leading up to Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's residence were surrounded by Moroccan police and the members arriving to the meeting were reportedly dragged, beaten and forcibly blocked from entering. At 5PM, while helping a member of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement entered her residence, both Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and her colleague were dragged by the police, beaten and prevented from entering her home. Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's daughter recorded videos of the incident before she herself was reportedly attacked and police officers destroyed her phone. Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's husband was also attacked during the incident.

After the incident, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire complained to the officers at the scene. The officers responded by damaging and removing the electricity box outside her home which cut off her electricity. Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire was then forcibly carried away by the officers and forcibly pushed back inside her house. The police officers then reportedly threatened her saying they had people working for them living in the building with her, and that next time she would be carried out the building dead. At 9PM that night, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's door was kicked in and her broken mobile phone and electricity box were thrown inside her home. She remains without electricity.

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire has been frequently harassed by the Moroccan authorities as a result of her peaceful human rights activities. She has been physically and verbally abused several times by the authorities during her participation in peaceful demonstrations. Since her arbitrary [arrest](#) on 15 November 2019, the woman human rights defender has had her monthly welfare payments cut off. On 15 May 2020, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire was released under high security measures which included the stationing of security forces outside her home and restricted access to her home by relatives and friends. The woman human rights defender and her family have also had their safety threatened consistently by the Moroccan authorities.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the continual harassment of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and the other Sahrawi human rights defenders in Western Sahara. Front Line Defenders believes that Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire is being targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line urges the authorities in Morocco to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the death threats and assault against Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and her family with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire [as well as of the members of her family];
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Western Sahara are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions [including judicial harassment].

Front Line Defenders Board of Directors

Denis O'Brien, Jim Conway, Maria Mulcahy, Kieran Mulvey, Mary Jane Real (Philippines), David Sykes, Arnold Tsunga (Zimbabwe), Verónica Vidal (Uruguay)

Front Line Defenders International Advisory Council

James L. Cavallaro, Maryam Elahi, Michel Forst, Hina Jilani, Mary Lawlor

Front Line, The International Foundation for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders trading as Front Line Defenders, is registered in Ireland as a company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. Registered Office: Second Floor, Grattan House, Temple Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, A94 FA39, Ireland.

Company No. 593190; Registered Charity No. 20204494; CHY 22404