

12 November 2021

## **Western Sahara: Woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya attacked in her home**

On 8 November 2021, Sahrawi woman human rights defender **Sultana Khaya** was attacked, sexually and physically assaulted and forcibly injected with an unknown liquid in her home by Moroccan security forces. Sultana Khaya's sister and elderly mother were also attacked and sexually assaulted by the forces.

[Sultana Khaya](#) is a Sahrawi woman human rights defender whose work focuses on women's rights and promoting the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people. The woman human rights defender is President of the organisation League for the Defense of Human Rights and against Plunder of Natural Resources. Sultana Khaya regularly participates in peaceful demonstrations advocating for the right to self-determination and denouncing violence against Sahrawi women.

On 8 November at 4:30AM, two buses full of masked Moroccan security forces in plain-clothes parked outside and broke into Sultana Khaya's house. The officers forcibly entered the house using a construction crane to get up to the roof, before making their way down to open the door to allow more agents to come in. The officers then went to where Sultana Khaya and her family lived and broke into the apartment, without presenting any warrant. Sultana Khaya was aggressively handled by the officers who zip-tied her wrists behind her back and stripped her. They continued to physically and sexually assault her and her sister, Laura Khaya, before forcibly injecting her with an unknown substance, proclaiming that Sultana Khaya would be sick and no longer able to protest. The officers physically and sexually assaulted the three women before leaving at 6:30AM, taunting them with death threats.

Sultana Khaya has been under de facto house arrest since 19 November 2020, with Moroccan security forces maintaining a heavy presence outside her house, during which time the woman human rights defender has been subjected to physical, verbal and sexual assaults. On 1 July 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders Mary Lawlor condemned the reprisals against Sultana Khaya and "expressed particular concern about the apparent use of violence and the threat of violence to prevent and obstruct women human rights defenders in their peaceful human rights activities in Western Sahara."

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the most recent raid, physical assault and sexual harassment carried out by Moroccan security forces against woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya and her family members, and reiterates its concern about the arbitrary house arrest and the ongoing harassment of the woman human rights defender. Front Line Defenders believes that Sultana Khaya is being targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work. Front Line Defenders is also deeply concerned about the targeting of peaceful Sahrawi activists and highlights that their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities should be carried out without deterrence.

### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally remove all restrictions on the free movement of Sultana Khaya and her family, and cease all further forms of surveillance or harassment against

them, as it is believed that these measures are solely related to Sultana Khaya's legitimate human rights activities;

2. Allow and provide immediate medical assistance to Sultana Khaya, her sister, other family members and other human rights defenders and activists who suffered as the result of the raid;
3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the sexual harassment and sexual assault, physical assaults and threats by Moroccan security forces against woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya and her sister, and the physical assault of her family, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. 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].

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