

13 January 2022

Western Sahara: Human rights defender Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi threatened by traffic officers and fined 400 Moroccan Dirhams

On 5 January 2022, human rights defender **Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi** was stopped by traffic officers in Al Amal Street in Laayoune, Western Sahara. The human rights defender, who was in the car with his three-year-old son, was insulted and threatened with charges of assaulting public officers. The human rights defender was charged with a traffic violation and fined 400 Moroccan Dirhams, which are approximately 38 Euros.

Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi is a Sahrawi human rights defender and the director of the Sahrawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA). His work focuses on the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, and on documenting human rights violations by Moroccan security forces in Western Sahara.

On 5 January 2022, Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi was stopped by traffic officers at around 1.00PM while he was driving his car in Amal Street, Laayoune, Western Sahara. Although the human rights defender complied to the authorities' orders, the traffic officers reportedly resorted to insults towards him and his 3-year-old son, before forcibly and aggressively confiscating the car keys from the human rights defender, causing great distress to the child. When Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi protested against their actions, he was threatened to be accused of assaulting public officials. After approximately an hour of interrogation at the scene, the human rights defender was asked for the registration documents of his car and then charged with a traffic violation fine amounting to 400 Moroccan Dirhams (approximately 38 Euros). Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi was detained at the location for around three hours, and was only released due to the pressure exerted by his friends and family who arrived at the scene.

Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi has been repeatedly harassed due to his work for Sahrawi rights and his position as the director of CODESA. On 10 May 2021, the human rights defender reported that he was kidnapped, tortured and left in an unknown field with two other Sahrawi activists by the security intelligence. He has also been blacklisted from jobs and employers have been threatened by security intelligence officers not to hire him due to his involvement with the CODESA and his work for Sahrawi rights. The attacks against Sahrawi human rights defenders, and in particular CODESA members, has recently escalated due to the organisation's opening of new branches in the cities of Guelmim, Tantan and Assa-Zag. Members of the new branches and their families have been intimidated and threatened with being blacklisted for other jobs if they continue working in the organisation. Women CODESA members have also reported being sexually assaulted by security forces in an effort to intimidate them and inhibit their human rights work.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the targeted harassment of human rights defender Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi and believes that it is solely motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights activities.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:

1. Stop the targeted harassment of Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi, and his fellow CODESA members, for their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities;
2. 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 respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw attention to Article 6 (b): *“Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others: (b) As provided for in human rights and other applicable international instruments, freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms”*, and to Article 12 (2): *“The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson

Executive Director