

18 November 2019

Western Sahara: Arbitrary detention of woman human rights defender Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire

On 15 November 2019, woman human rights defender **Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire** was arbitrarily detained by the Moroccan forces in the city of El Ayoun. The reason behind her arrest and the charges she is facing are still unknown, and all family and lawyer visits continue to be banned.

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 15 November 2019, from 10:00am, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire attended her cousin's hearing at El Ayoun Court. During the hearing session the judge ordered all the attendees to leave, except for Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire. She was then interrogated at the Court until 8:00pm, and was transferred to a local police station, where her interrogation continued. During her transfer to the police station, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire was ill-treated and physically abused by the police officers.

On 16 November 2019, after spending around thirty hours in interrogation, Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire was transferred to El Ayoun prison. Her lawyer was not allowed to attend the interrogation, nor was she allowed to make any contact with him. Since her detention Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire has not been permitted to contact any family member including her two children.

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire, has been frequently harassed by the Moroccan authorities as a result of her human rights activities. She has been physically and verbally abused several times by authorities during demonstrations and in December 2015, they cut her monthly welfare payments for two months.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the continual harassments of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire and the other Sahrawi human rights defenders. 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 Defenders urge the Moroccan authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the *'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment'*, adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Allow Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire immediate and unfettered access to her family and lawyer;
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.

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 your attention to Article 5: *“For the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, at the national and international levels: (a) To meet or assemble peacefully”* 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