

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC

October 14, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to urge the State Department to prioritize engagement with the Moroccan government about human rights abuses, including calling for the release of political detainees and an end to the harassment and threats against critics of the Moroccan government. We urge you to increase the Department's focus on human rights abuses against Sahrawi activists in Western Sahara and Morocco by including a mandate to monitor human rights and ensuring the right for self-determination is maintained in the renewal of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) at the end of this month.

International human rights groups are documenting crackdowns in Morocco against those critical of King Mohammed VI and the government. We are especially concerned about journalists like Yahdih Essabi and Maati Monjib and political and social media activists like Mohamed Sekkaki. Their imprisonment and charges raise grave concerns about the administration of justice in Morocco. We are concerned about reports that prisoners are not receiving proper medical care and are facing abuse by prison officials. Additionally, Sahrawi activist Sultana Khaya and her family are being held under house arrest and reportedly have been subjected to ongoing sexual abuse and harassment by authorities, despite never being told the charges against her.^[1] These detentions are unacceptable, and we urge you to advocate for the release of all political prisoners in Morocco.

In July 2021, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) called on the Moroccan government to stop targeting human rights defenders and journalists in Western Sahara.^[2] The OHCHR accused the Moroccan government of arresting peaceful activists for lawful Sahrawi activities and sentencing them to disproportionately long sentences. We request the Administration to support OHCHR's call, and to urge the Moroccan authorities to revisit the cases of activists like Mohamed Lamine Haddi, Sidi Abdallah Abbahah, and Bachir Khadda who face decades-long sentences for protesting the dire economic and social conditions in Western Sahara.^[3]

We are concerned that the Moroccan government has been emboldened in their abuse of Sahrawi activists since the United States' misguided recognition of Morocco's claims of sovereignty over Western Sahara in December 2020. This is unacceptable. Our nation's actions should never be a

^[1] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MDE2941982021ENGLISH.pdf>

^[2] <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=27244&LangID=E>

^[3] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde29/4275/2021/en/>

license to engage in human rights violations. As the UN drafts the renewal of MINURSO's mandate, we urge you to seek the inclusion of language to enable the UN to monitor human rights conditions in the region and continue support for self-determination.

The United States must be an advocate for human rights around the world. Yet, concerning abuses by Moroccan authorities, especially against Sahrawis, the administration has said little publicly. We urge you to reaffirm the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination, and to advocate for the release of political prisoners and protect freedom of expression for every Moroccan and Sahrawi.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
U.S. Senator



James M. Inhofe
U.S. Senator



Cory A. Booker
U.S. Senator



Richard J. Durbin
U.S. Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
U.S. Senator



Patrick Leahy
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator



Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senator



John Boozman
U.S. Senator



Bernard Sanders
U.S. Senator