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## **MOROCCO/WESTERN SAHARA SAHRAWI ACTIVIST BEATEN BY PRISON GUARDS**

On 15, 17, 18 and 21 March, five prison guards entered the cell of Sahrawi activist Mohamed Lamine Haddi, beat him with batons and cut his beard against his will. This came after he declared his intention to go on hunger strike to protest his prison conditions and denial of medical attention. Visits by his lawyer and family have been banned since March 2020. He has been held in solitary confinement since 2017, when he was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment in the unfair “Gdeim Izik” mass trial.

Mohamed Lamine Haddi told his family in a phone call that on 15 March 2022, five prison guards entered his cell and beat him with batons and used metal pliers to cut his beard against his will. He had announced to the prison guards the previous day that he planned to do a hunger strike on 16 and 17 March to protest his prison conditions and the denial of a medical visit, despite repeated demands, and said that if his demands were still not met, then he intended to go on indefinite hunger strike from 18 March. The beating appears to be retaliation for his planned hunger strike and is a violation of his right to freedom of expression, as well as ill-treatment against a detainee. The authorities should not use measures to punish hunger strikers or to coerce them to end a hunger strike.

He guards returned to his cell on 17, 18 and 21 March and beat him again with batons. He has a hematoma on the left side of his face from where the guards beat him, and prison guards have refused his requests to see a doctor and to have medicine for his serious digestive problem. He told the prison guards on 21 March that he wanted to make a complaint to the King's Prosecutor about the guards' ill-treatment towards him. The guards said that they would not lodge his complaint and beat him. The phone-call to his family on 21 March lasted a total of four minutes as the guards cut-off the call twice; according to his sister, whenever he begins to tell his family about his ill-treatment by the guards, they cut the phone-line.

### **Write to the Head of Government urging him to:**

- end the ill-treatment of Mohamed Lamine Haddi, holding accountable all those responsible, and to remove him from solitary confinement
- grant him immediate access to adequate medical care, regular and unfettered access to his family and lawyer
- ensure that his detention conditions conform to international law and standards.
- take all measures to ensure a fair retrial for Mohamed Lamine Haddi and other Gdeim Izik prisoners to take place soon before an ordinary civilian court, in line with international law

**Write to:**

Head of Government of the Kingdom of Morocco

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Salutation: Your Excellency:

**And Copy:**

Her Excellency Souriya Otmani

Ambassador

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**Additional information**

Mohamed Lamine Haddi is a Sahrawi activist who participated in the 2010 Gdeim Izik camp protesting Sahrawis' social and economic conditions. In November 2010, he was arrested in the violent clashes following the dismantling of the camp. In 2013, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison on charges of participation in and aiding a "criminal organisation," and participation in violence against public forces which caused intended death under Articles 293, 129 and 267 of the Moroccan Penal Code. The military court which tried him and other Sahrawis, all of them civilians, did not investigate the defendants' claims that they had been forced to sign confessions under torture. A civilian court confirmed his sentence in 2017, using the statements that he said had been made under torture.

Since being in Tiflet II prison, prison guards have subjected Mohamed to regular verbal abuse, including death and torture threats. Mohamed is not permitted to leave his cell, even for the one-hour walk that he was previously allowed, and so spends 24 hours per day in his cell. During the winter, he was not allowed hot showers like other prisoners. In March 2022, his family sent him a package containing books and medicine, but the prison director refused to give him anything except for one book. On 4 April 2022, Mohamed Lamine Haddi called his family to tell them that prison guards had transferred him to Kenitra prison on 28 March 2022 and held him there until 4 April 2022, in a small cell the size of a toilet cubicle.

Mohamed Lamine Haddi's health severely deteriorated following his 69-day hunger strike in January 2021, which he went on to demand an end to his ill-treatment. During that time, he told his family that he did not receive any medical care during his hunger strike, despite suffering partial paralysis, trembling, memory loss and severe pain. Prison guards force-fed him, ending his hunger strike non-consensually on 23 March 2021. In a phone-call to his family on 9 April 2021, Mohamed Lamine Haddi said that the prison director had threatened to put him in a small, dungeon-like cell if his family

continued to publicize his case. According to his lawyer, the prison authorities previously detained Mohamed Lamine Haddi in such a cell in 2018 as punishment. His lawyer described the cell as a small room of 2m<sup>2</sup> with no window, tap nor toilet. It is known as the “punishment cell” or “coffin” because it is the same size. His family called the King’s Prosecutor and the prison director several times, with no response.

Human rights international standards, such as the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, define solitary confinement as spending 22 hours or more per day without meaningful human contact. They provide that prolonged solitary confinement – over 15 consecutive days – is considered cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Under the Moroccan Prison Law, solitary confinement is an exceptional measure imposed only as a security or protective measure for prisoners. Morocco’s Penal Code also criminalizes torture.

Western Sahara is the subject of a territorial dispute between Morocco, which annexed the territory in 1975, and claims sovereignty over it, and the Polisario Front, which calls for an independent state in the territory. In recent years, access to Western Sahara has grown increasingly difficult for external monitors as the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate. The UN Security Council has ignored calls by Amnesty International and others to add a human rights component to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which would allow for monitoring and reporting on human rights abuses.