

Advocacy dossier

Ahmed Ettanji

أحمد التنجي

At liberty **Morocco**

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The case at a glance

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Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**9 Oct 2024**	**Morocco**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Drop any charges that remain on record against Ahmed Ettanji in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Ahmed Ettanji faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Ahmed Ettanji can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Criminalisation of solidarity International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5

Press freedom violation International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19

Threats and intimidation UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Unlawful surveillance International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17

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How the case unfolded

2009

Defender activity

Co-founded Équipe Média

Ettanji co-founded Équipe Média, a media organization dedicated to breaking Morocco's information blockade of Western Sahara.

21 November 2020

Context

Kept under house arrest for 48 hours on his wedding day

Police surrounded his family home in Laayoune on the day of his planned wedding to journalist Nazha El Khalidi and kept him under house arrest for 48 hours. Her family home was also besieged.

9 October 2024

Arrest

Detained at checkpoint

Moroccan authorities held Ettanji at a checkpoint in Cape Bojador for approximately one hour upon his arrival for a family visit.

9 October 2024

Threats and intimidation

Expelled from Cape Bojador

Police surrounded the family home, threatened Ettanji and Mayara with arrest, and forced them to leave the town and return to Laayoune.

9 October 2024

Release

Let go after about an hour at the checkpoint

Moroccan authorities released Ettanji and Mohamed Mayara without explanation after holding them for about an hour at the Cape Bojador checkpoint.

24 October 2024

Call by others

Observatory urgent appeal on his expulsion

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (FIDH and OMCT) issued an urgent appeal on the restrictions, intimidation and expulsion of Ettanji and Mohamed Mayara.

3 January 2025

UN opinion or decision

UN Special Rapporteurs raise his case with Morocco

Three UN Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Moroccan government about the expulsion of Ettanji and Mohamed Mayara from Cape Bojador (communication AL MAR 2/2024).

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against Front Line Defenders, the FIDH and OMCT Observatory, UN special procedures and press coverage up to February 2026. No arrest or charge has been reported since UN Special Rapporteurs raised his expulsion from Cape Bojador with Morocco in January 2025; Ahmed Ettanji is at liberty and continues to lead Équipe Média, where he works with Mohamed Mayara.

Background and Work

Ahmed Ettanji is a Sahrawi journalist and human rights defender working in occupied Western Sahara. He co-founded Équipe Média in 2009, a media organization established to circumvent Morocco's information blockade of the territory. The organization documents human rights violations committed by Moroccan authorities and works to raise international awareness of the situation in Western Sahara. Ettanji serves as president of Équipe Média.

The media environment in Western Sahara is tightly controlled. International journalists face systematic restrictions on access, and local Sahrawi voices are subject to surveillance, harassment, and prosecution. Équipe Média operates in this constrained space, gathering testimony, recording incidents, and publishing material that challenges the official narrative. The organization collaborates with the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Serious Human Rights Violations, co-founded in 2005 by Ettanji's colleague Mohamed Mayara.

The Expulsion from Cape Bojador

On 9 October 2024, Ettanji and Mayara traveled to Cape Bojador, a coastal town in the southern part of occupied Western Sahara, to visit family. Upon arrival at the local checkpoint, Moroccan authorities detained them for approximately one hour before releasing them without explanation. When the two defenders reached the family home, they found it surrounded by Moroccan police, including the Police Commissioner of Cape Bojador, auxiliary forces, and other occupation officials.

The authorities demanded that Ettanji and Mayara leave the house and the town immediately. They threatened arrest if the defenders did not comply. The host family was also intimidated; officials threatened to search their home as punishment for hosting the two men. Facing arrest and unwilling to subject their relatives to further reprisals, Ettanji and Mayara left Cape Bojador and returned to Laayoune, the largest city in the territory.

Pattern of Harassment and Restrictions

The expulsion from Cape Bojador is part of a documented pattern of restrictions on Ettanji's freedom of movement and assembly. Moroccan authorities systematically target Sahrawi human rights defenders, subjecting them to surveillance, arbitrary detention, and reprisals designed to isolate them from the communities they serve. Defenders who document violations or maintain contact with international organizations face heightened scrutiny. Those who host them or provide logistical support are also threatened, creating a climate in which solidarity itself becomes a risk.

Ettanji's work with Équipe Média places him at the center of this targeting. The organization's

documentation activities directly challenge Morocco's control over information flows from the territory. By recording violations and disseminating accounts from Sahrawi victims, Équipe Média undermines the narrative of stability and normalcy that Moroccan authorities seek to project. The expulsion from Cape Bojador illustrates the lengths to which authorities will go to prevent Ettanji from moving freely within his own homeland, even for family visits.

This was not the first time. On 21 November 2020, the day of his planned wedding to journalist Nazha El Khalidi, police surrounded his family home in Laayoune and kept him under house arrest for 48 hours; her family home was also besieged. In October 2024 the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders issued an urgent appeal on his case, and in January 2025 three UN Special Rapporteurs raised the Cape Bojador expulsion with the Moroccan government.

Ongoing Restrictions

Ettanji continues to lead Équipe Média despite sustained harassment. The restrictions he faces are mirrored in the experiences of other Sahrawi journalists and defenders, many of whom operate under travel bans, face criminal prosecution for their reporting, or endure prolonged detention. The targeting of Ettanji and his colleagues reflects Morocco's broader strategy of suppressing dissent in Western Sahara and preventing independent documentation of conditions in the territory.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/ahmed-ettanji/

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