

Advocacy dossier

Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi

بابوزيد محمد سعيد لبيهي

Western Sahara

Sahrawi human rights defender elected president of CODESA, the Sahrawi human rights network, in September 2020, who has been placed under surveillance and barred from his workplace at the port of Dakhla. He reported being abducted and tortured in May 2021, and in January 2022 traffic police held him for about three hours and fined him.

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The case at a glance

Sahrawi human rights defender elected president of CODESA, the Sahrawi human rights network, in September 2020, who has been placed under surveillance and barred from his workplace at the port of Dakhla. He reported being abducted and tortured in May 2021, and in January 2022 traffic police held him for about three hours and fined him.

Country	**Western Sahara**
Charges	Traffic fine of 400 dirhams (January 2022), an administrative penalty

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Open a prompt, effective and impartial investigation into every assault, threat and act of surveillance documented against Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi, including any committed by police or security officers.

02 Act on the complaints Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi has already filed, and inform Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi and counsel of what has been done on each.

03 Identify and prosecute those responsible, whatever office they hold.

04 Put protection measures in place, agreed with Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi, and end the surveillance and the pressure on the organisation.

05 Guarantee that Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi can continue this work without reprisal, as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders requires.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

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

Defamation and smear campaign International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

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

Torture Convention against Torture, Articles 1, 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

03

How the case unfolded

22 December 2020

Other act

Placed under physical surveillance after his election as CODESA president

Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi reported that he had been under physical surveillance since 22 December 2020, after his election as president of CODESA on 28 September 2020.

February 2021

Professional ban imposed

Barred from his workplace at the port of Dakhla

Front Line Defenders reported in February 2021 that, after his election as president of CODESA on 28 September 2020, he had been banned from entering his workplace at the port of Dakhla and that the authorities had threatened fishing companies in the port so that they would not employ him.

10 May 2021

Ill-treatment

Reports abduction and torture by intelligence officers

Babouzeid reported that security intelligence officers abducted him along with two other Sahrawi activists, tortured them, and abandoned them in an unknown field.

5 January 2022

Other act

Detained at traffic stop for three hours

Traffic officers stopped Babouzeid in Laayoune while his young son was in the car. Officers insulted them, forcibly took his keys, threatened him with assault charges, and held him at the scene for about three hours before fining him 400 dirhams for a traffic violation.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked a second time for 2025 and 2026 developments. No detention of Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi has been reported since the January 2022 traffic stop, and no trusted source from 2025 or 2026 names him; FIDH and OMCT referred to Ali Salem Tamek as president of CODESA in July 2026.

Background and Work

Babouzeid Mohamad Said Labbihi is a Sahrawi human rights defender and the director of the Sahrawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), an organisation that documents abuses committed by Moroccan security forces in Western Sahara and advocates for the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. Western Sahara remains a disputed territory, claimed by Morocco and by the Polisario Front on behalf of the Sahrawi people. Human rights defenders working in the territory face systematic repression.

CODESA operates in a legal grey zone. It is not formally recognised by Moroccan authorities, and its members work under constant surveillance. Babouzeid's role as director places him at the centre of efforts to monitor forced disappearances, torture, and arbitrary detention in the region. His documentation work feeds into international advocacy and periodic United Nations reporting on the territory's status.

Kidnapping, Torture, and Employment Blacklisting

Babouzeid reported that on 10 May 2021 he was kidnapped by security intelligence officers along with two other Sahrawi activists. They were tortured and later abandoned in an unknown field. The details of the torture have not been fully disclosed, but the incident was part of a broader pattern of abductions targeting CODESA members during that period.

Babouzeid has also been blacklisted from formal employment. Front Line Defenders reported in February 2021 that, after his election as president of CODESA on 28 September 2020, he was banned from entering his workplace at the port of Dakhla and the authorities threatened fishing companies in the port so that they would not employ him. The blacklisting extends to other members of the organisation and serves as both economic pressure and social isolation.

The January 2022 Traffic Stop

On 5 January 2022, at approximately 1:00 PM, Babouzeid was stopped by traffic officers while driving in Laayoune. His young son was in the car. Although he complied with the officers' instructions, they insulted him and his child. They then forcibly and aggressively confiscated his car keys, causing visible distress to the boy.

When Babouzeid protested their behaviour, the officers threatened to charge him with assaulting public officials. He was held at the roadside for about three hours; officers questioned him for about an hour and demanded his vehicle registration documents. He was eventually charged with a traffic violation and fined 400 Moroccan dirhams, approximately 38 euros. He was released only after friends and family arrived at the scene and applied

pressure on the officers.

Front Line Defenders recorded the incident as threats and intimidation against a human rights defender.

Escalating Repression Against CODESA

Harassment of CODESA members escalated in 2021 following the organisation's decision to open new branches in the cities of Guelmim, Tantan, and Assa-Zag, expanding its documentation capacity beyond Laayoune. Members of the new branches and their families have been intimidated and threatened with employment blacklisting if they continue their affiliation with the organisation.

Women members of CODESA have reported being sexually assaulted by security forces. These assaults serve a dual purpose: to intimidate the women themselves and to discourage other women from joining or remaining active in human rights work. The use of sexual violence as a tool of repression against women defenders is documented across multiple contexts in the region, but reporting and accountability remain rare.

Current Situation

No information about his situation after January 2022 has been published. At that time he reported that he could not find formal employment and that the harassment continued. The targeting he experiences is emblematic of the broader repression faced by Sahrawi defenders who document abuses and assert the right to self-determination in Western Sahara.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/babouzeid-mohamad-said-labbihi/

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