Advocacy dossier

Jalal Bouchaab

جلال بوشعاب

Detained (pretrial) **Western Sahara**

Jalal Bouchaab is a Sahrawi student-rights defender arrested in September 2021 after a peaceful demonstration in Guelmim, and held on charges of unlawful assembly alongside fellow activists Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch.

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The case at a glance

Jalal Bouchaab is a Sahrawi student-rights defender arrested in September 2021 after a peaceful demonstration in Guelmim, and held on charges of unlawful assembly alongside fellow activists Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch.

Status **Detained (pretrial)**	Arrested **14 Sep 2021**	Country **Western Sahara**
Charges Unlawful assembly		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Jalal Bouchaab immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

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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

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

Prolonged pretrial detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9(3)

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

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How the case unfolded

9 September 2021

Defender activity

Participation in peaceful demonstration

Jalal Bouchaab participated in a peaceful demonstration in Guelmim, Western Sahara.

14 September 2021

Arrest

Arrest at residence

Jalal was arrested at his home alongside Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch on charges of unlawful assembly.

16 September 2021

Hearing

Appearance before prosecutor

Jalal appeared before the prosecutor in Guelmim and was transferred to Bouizakarne Prison.

4 November 2021

Hearing

Virtual hearing for co-defendants

Co-defendants Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch attended a virtual session before the criminal chamber in Guelmim; audio and video quality were extremely poor.

9 November 2021

Hearing

Appeal hearing rescheduled

The Guelmim Court of Appeal rescheduled the appeal hearing for Bouhriga and Ahrouch to 16 November 2021 at the request of their defense counsel.

15 November 2021

Hearing

Hearing before Court of First Instance

Jalal was scheduled to appear before the Guelmim Court of First Instance.

16 November 2021

Hearing

Co-defendants' appeal hearing

Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch's appeal hearing took place before the Guelmim Court of Appeal.

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The full story

Background and Work

Jalal Bouchaab is a Sahrawi human rights defender focused on student rights and the documentation of abuses against Sahrawi activists. He is a member of the preparatory committee of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), a network established to defend and promote the rights of the Sahrawi people in Western Sahara and the southern regions of Morocco.

His work centered on two core activities: denouncing the imprisonment of Sahrawi human rights defenders and documenting the activities and struggles of Sahrawi students. In a region where activism is met with surveillance, arrest, and prosecution, his documentation provided a record of repression that authorities sought to suppress.

The Arrest

On 9 September 2021, Jalal participated in a peaceful demonstration in Guelmim, a city in southern Morocco near the disputed territory of Western Sahara. Five days later, on 14 September 2021, he was arrested at his residence alongside two fellow CODESA members, Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch. All three were charged with unlawful assembly.

On 16 September 2021, Jalal and his co-defendants appeared before the prosecutor in Guelmim. Immediately following the hearing, they were transferred to Bouizakarne Prison in Guelmim province, where they were held in pre-trial detention.

Legal Proceedings

The prosecution of Jalal and his co-defendants has been characterized by procedural irregularities and poor conditions for the exercise of defense rights. On 4 November 2021, Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch attended a virtual session before the criminal chamber of the Guelmim court. The audio and video quality during the session was extremely poor, making it difficult for the defendants to hear the prosecutor and vice versa. Sahrawi defenders observed that such virtual sessions, increasingly used against Sahrawi political prisoners and human rights defenders, afford judges broad discretion in interpreting defendants' statements.

On 9 November 2021, the Guelmim Court of Appeal rescheduled the appeal hearing for Bouhriga and Ahrouch to 16 November 2021, at the request of their defense counsel. Jalal's case was scheduled to be heard before the Guelmim Court of First Instance on 15 November 2021.

The last available report, from November 2021, said Jalal remained in detention. The charges of unlawful assembly stem solely from his participation in a peaceful demonstration and his work documenting human rights violations in Western Sahara.

Pattern of Repression

The arrest and prosecution of Jalal Bouchaab, Hamza Bouhriga, and Jamal Ahrouch form part of a broader pattern of judicial harassment targeting Sahrawi human rights defenders. Charges of unlawful assembly, along with accusations under Morocco's anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws, are routinely used to criminalize peaceful activism and

documentation work.

The use of poor-quality virtual court sessions, noted by Sahrawi defenders as an emerging tactic, undermines the right to a fair hearing and the ability of defendants to participate meaningfully in their own defense. These procedural deficiencies compound the substantive injustice of prosecuting individuals for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

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

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