ADVOCACY DOSSIER

JAMAL AHROUCH

جمال أحروش

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **Western Sahara**

Jamal Ahrouch is a Sahrawi trade unionist arrested after participating in a peaceful demonstration in Gulemim. He was held in Bouizakarne Prison from September 2021, and in November 2021 an appeal court sentenced him to 15 months in prison for unlawful assembly.

HuMENA.

Prepared by HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement · 8 November 2026

Case reference HM-EH-2026-031

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THE CASE AT A GLANCE

Jamal Ahrouch is a Sahrawi trade unionist arrested after participating in a peaceful demonstration in Gulemim. He was held in Bouizakarne Prison from September 2021, and in November 2021 an appeal court sentenced him to 15 months in prison for unlawful assembly.

STATUS	**Imprisoned (serving sentence)**
ARRESTED	**14 Sep 2021**
COUNTRY	**Western Sahara**
SENTENCE	**15 months in prison (Guelmim Court of Appeal, November 2021).**
CHARGES	**Unlawful assembly**

WE CALL ON THE AUTHORITIES TO:

WHAT WE ASK

01 Release Jamal Ahrouch 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.

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

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DOCUMENTED VIOLATIONS

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

Ahrouch participated in a peaceful demonstration in Gulemim protesting economic and political conditions facing Sahrawi communities.

14 September 2021

ARREST

Arrest at residence

Plainclothes security officers arrested Ahrouch at his home under the charge of unlawful assembly. Two fellow CODESA members were arrested the same day.

16 September 2021

TRANSFER BETWEEN PLACES OF DETENTION

Transfer to Bouizakarne Prison

After two days held incommunicado, he was brought before the Public Prosecutor in Gulemim and then sent to Bouizakarne Prison in the Gulemim region, where he was held in pre-trial detention.

4 November 2021

HEARING

Virtual hearing with technical failures

Ahrouch attended a virtual session before the Criminal Chamber in Gulemim. The video and sound quality was extremely poor, preventing clear communication between defendants and the prosecutor.

9 November 2021

HEARING

Appeal hearing rescheduled

The Court of Appeals in Gulemim rescheduled the appeal hearing to 16 November at the request of the defence.

16 November 2021

HEARING

Appeal hearing

Ahrouch appeared before the Court of Appeals in Gulemim for the rescheduled appeal hearing.

30 November 2021

CONVICTION

Appeal court in Guelmim sentences him to 15 months

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THE FULL STORY

Background and Work

Jamal Ahrouch is a trade unionist and human rights defender from Western Sahara. He has been deeply involved in the Field Coordination of Unemployed Sahrawi, a grassroots movement addressing the economic marginalisation and unemployment faced by Sahrawi communities. His work has focused on organising demonstrations, sit-ins, and advocacy campaigns to demand labour rights and economic justice.

Ahrouch is also a member of the preparatory committee of the Sahrawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), an organisation that documents human rights violations in the territory and advocates for the release of Sahrawi political prisoners. CODESA's work has made it a target of state surveillance and judicial repression.

His activism is rooted in the broader struggle for Sahrawi self-determination. Western Sahara has been under Moroccan control since 1975, a status contested by the Polisario Front and not recognised by the United Nations. Human rights defenders in the territory face systematic restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association.

The Arrest

On 9 September 2021, Ahrouch participated in a peaceful demonstration in Gulemim, a city in southern Morocco near Western Sahara. The demonstration was organised to protest economic and political conditions facing Sahrawi communities.

Five days later, on 14 September 2021, plainclothes security officers arrived at his residence and arrested him. He was charged with "unlawful assembly" under Moroccan criminal law. Two fellow CODESA members, Hamza Bouhriga and Jalal Bouchaab, were arrested at their homes on the same day.

The three men were held incommunicado for two days. On 16 September 2021, they were presented before the Public Prosecutor in Gulemim, then immediately transferred to Bouizakarne Prison in the Gulemim region, where they were held in pre-trial detention.

Legal Proceedings and Judicial Harassment

On 4 November 2021, Ahrouch and Bouhriga attended a virtual hearing before the Criminal Chamber of the Court of First Instance in Gulemim. The session was marred by severe technical failures. The video and audio connection was of such poor quality that neither the defendants nor the prosecutor could be heard clearly. Defence lawyers have documented a pattern in which virtual hearings, increasingly used against Sahrawi defenders, afford judges wide discretion in interpreting defendants' statements without proper transcription or oversight.

An appeal hearing was initially scheduled for 9 November 2021 before the Court of Appeals in Gulemim. At the request of the defence, the hearing was rescheduled to 16 November 2021. Bouchaab, who was tried separately, was scheduled to appear before the Court of First Instance in Gulemim on 15 November 2021.

The charges against all three men stem solely from their participation in a peaceful demonstration. No evidence of violence or incitement has been presented. The use of "unlawful assembly" provisions to criminalise peaceful protest is a recurring tactic in cases involving Sahrawi defenders.

Detention Conditions

Ahrouch was held in Bouizakarne Prison from September 2021. The facility is located in a remote area, making family visits difficult. Conditions in Moroccan prisons holding Sahrawi detainees have been documented to include overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and restrictions on legal and family contact.

No information has been made public regarding Ahrouch's health or access to legal counsel during detention beyond the scheduled court appearances.

International Response

Human rights organisations have called for the immediate release of Ahrouch, Bouhriga, and Bouchaab. The case has been highlighted as emblematic of the systematic repression faced by Sahrawi human rights defenders who document abuses or advocate for labour and political rights in the territory.

Morocco has been urged to end the use of criminal prosecution to silence peaceful dissent and to guarantee the rights of all defendants to fair trial, including in-person hearings with adequate legal representation.

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SAMPLE LETTER

Copy it, adapt it and send it from your own address.

Your Excellency,

I am writing to demand the immediate release of Jamal Ahrouch, trade unionist and human rights defender; advocate for Sahrawi and labour rights; member of the preparatory committee of CODESA, currently detained in Western Sahara since 14 September 2021, and an end to all reprisals tied to this case.

In brief: Jamal Ahrouch is a Sahrawi trade unionist arrested after participating in a peaceful demonstration in Gulemim. He was held in Bouizakarne Prison from September 2021, and in November 2021 an appeal court sentenced him to 15 months in prison for unlawful assembly.

I respectfully urge your authorities to:
1. Release Jamal Ahrouch immediately and unconditionally;
2. Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights;
3. Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

I will continue to monitor this case until Jamal Ahrouch is free.

Respectfully,

[Your name]
[Your city, country]
8 November 2026