

Advocacy dossier

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire

محفوظة بمبا لفقير

At liberty **Western Sahara**

A mother and advocate in El Ayoun, Western Sahara, organising workshops for families of political prisoners. After hosting a meeting to support a colleague under house arrest, police beat her outside her own door and cut her electricity.

01

The case at a glance

A mother and advocate in El Ayoun, Western Sahara, organising workshops for families of political prisoners. After hosting a meeting to support a colleague under house arrest, police beat her outside her own door and cut her electricity.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**15 Nov 2019**	**Western Sahara**

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire 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

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

Denial of family visits UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 58

Gender based violence Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 35
Convention against Torture, Article 1

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

Physical assault International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 7, 9

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

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

03

How the case unfolded

15 November 2019

Arrest

Arrested at a relative's trial in El Ayoun

She was arrested at the El Ayoun court during the trial of her cousin, after speaking out about the treatment of Sahrawi prisoners. After the arrest, authorities cut off her monthly welfare payments.

27 November 2019

Conviction

Sentenced to six months in prison

The Laayoune Court of First Instance sentenced her to six months in prison for obstruction of justice and insulting a public official.

12 December 2019

Appeal: judgment upheld

Sentence upheld on appeal

The appeal court upheld her six-month prison sentence.

6 February 2020

Medical care denied

Denied medical care in Lakhal prison

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders reported that she suffered from a chronic sinus condition, asthma and skin sensitivity, that prison authorities refused her medication, transfer to an outside hospital and visits by her own doctor, and that her lawyer had not been allowed to visit her.

15 May 2020

Release

Released after serving her sentence

She was released from Lakhal prison in El Ayoun after serving her full sentence. Security forces were then stationed outside her home and access by relatives and friends was restricted.

16 September 2020

Smear and defamation

Targeted by an online smear article

An online article published defamatory claims about her private life.

12 November 2020

Movement restriction and exile

Police surround her home and bar the family from leaving

Plain-clothes police surrounded her home on 12 and 13 November 2020 and prevented the family from leaving, without any court order.

25 January 2021

Context

Daughter stopped and questioned by police

A plain-clothes officer stopped and questioned her daughter. When Mahfouda intervened, she was threatened with detention.

25 September 2021

Physical assault

Assault and intimidation at residence

Moroccan police surrounded her home, beat her and colleagues attempting to enter, attacked her daughter and destroyed her phone, removed her electricity box, and threatened her with death.

25 September 2021

Property damaged or destroyed

Door kicked in, property thrown inside

At 9 PM, officers kicked in her door and threw her broken phone and destroyed electricity box inside her home. She was left without electricity.

4 May 2023

Threats and intimidation

Police place her home under surveillance

Between 4 May and 20 June 2023 police kept her home in Laayoune under surveillance and followed her each time she left, after she visited Dakhla in solidarity with activists there.

4 September 2023

Physical assault

Assaulted as police disperse a protest in Laayoune

Police forcibly dispersed a peaceful protest in Laayoune on the first day of UN envoy Staffan de Mistura's first visit to Western Sahara and physically and verbally assaulted at least 23 Sahrawi protesters; she was among them, with Salha Boutenguiza.

25 February 2025

Other act

Protest she joined in Laayoune dispersed by force

She was among human rights defenders at a peaceful protest in Laayoune marking the anniversary of the proclamation of the Sahrawi Republic and calling for the release of Sahrawi prisoners. Plain-clothes security forces dispersed it with excessive force, and several defenders were chased and assaulted.

17 March 2025

Physical assault

Assaulted by police after a protest in Laayoune

Police physically assaulted her and fellow defender Salha Boutenguiza in Laayoune after a protest in Smara Street.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked a second time for 2025 and 2026 developments. Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire lives in El Ayoun; the most recent incident reported by a trusted source is the police assault on her and Salha Boutenguiza after a protest on 17 March 2025, and no later detention or attack has been reported.

Background and Work

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire is a human rights defender in El Ayoun, the largest city in Western Sahara, a territory whose sovereignty remains disputed and which has been under Moroccan control since 1975. She is a member of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement, a network formed after the violent dismantling of a protest camp in 2010 that left Sahrawi demonstrators dead and dozens imprisoned.

Her human rights activities centre on advocacy for self-determination and support for the families of Sahrawi political prisoners. She participates in peaceful demonstrations and organises workshops to provide emotional, material, and strategic support to relatives of those detained. Her work is embedded in the fabric of the El Ayoun human rights community, and her home has served as a meeting point for defenders planning solidarity actions.

The Assault of 25 September 2021

On the afternoon of 25 September 2021, Mahfouda planned to host members of the Gdeim Izik Peaceful Movement at her residence at 3 PM. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss support for Sultana Khaya, another woman human rights defender who had been under de facto house arrest since November 2020.

At approximately 2:45 PM, Moroccan police officers in both official uniforms and plainclothes surrounded Mahfouda's home and blocked the roads leading to it. As members of the Movement arrived, officers dragged them, beat them, and forcibly prevented them from entering. At 5 PM, Mahfouda herself attempted to help a colleague enter her home. Officers dragged her and her colleague, beat both of them, and barred them from the entrance.

Her daughter began filming the assault. Officers attacked her and destroyed her mobile phone. Mahfouda's husband was also physically attacked during the incident.

Threats, Property Damage, and Ongoing Intimidation

After the assault, Mahfouda confronted the officers at the scene. In response, they damaged and removed the electricity box mounted outside her home, cutting off power to her residence. Officers then physically carried Mahfouda and forced her back inside the house.

One officer threatened her directly, stating that they had informants living in her building and warning that the next time she would be carried out of the building dead. At 9 PM that evening, her door was kicked in. Her broken mobile phone and the destroyed electricity box were thrown inside. She was left without electricity.

Pattern of Harassment and Reprisal

The assault on 25 September 2021 was neither isolated nor unprecedented. Mahfouda has been subjected to harassment by Moroccan authorities repeatedly as a result of her human rights work. She has been physically and verbally abused on multiple occasions during her participation in peaceful demonstrations.

On 15 November 2019, she was arrested at the El Ayoun court during the trial of her cousin, after speaking out about the treatment of Sahrawi prisoners. On 27 November 2019 the Laayoune Court of First Instance sentenced her to six months in prison for obstruction of justice and insulting a public official, and the sentence was upheld on appeal on 12 December 2019. After the arrest, her monthly welfare payments were cut off. On 15 May 2020, she was released after serving her sentence, and security forces were then stationed permanently outside her home. Access to her residence by relatives and friends has been restricted since her release. She and her family have been threatened with harm on multiple occasions. In September 2020 an online article spread defamatory claims about her, in November 2020 police surrounded her home and barred the family from leaving, and in January 2021 an officer stopped and questioned her daughter. Amnesty International reported that police kept her home under surveillance from 4 May to 20 June 2023 and that she was among protesters assaulted when police dispersed a protest in Laayoune on 4 September 2023. On 25 February 2025 she was at a protest in Laayoune that security forces dispersed with excessive force, and on 17 March 2025 police assaulted her and Salha Boutenguiza after a protest in Smara Street in Laayoune.

Context: Repression of Sahrawi Defenders

Mahfouda Bamba Lefkire's case is part of a broader pattern of repression targeting Sahrawi human rights defenders in Western Sahara. Defenders advocating for self-determination, documenting abuses, or supporting political prisoners face systematic harassment, surveillance, detention, and violence. The targeting of women defenders in particular has included gender-based violence, home invasions, and sustained intimidation campaigns designed to isolate them from their communities and silence their advocacy.

Mahfouda is targeted because of her peaceful and legitimate human rights activities. Her work supporting families, organising collective action, and documenting violations places her in direct confrontation with authorities who seek to suppress dissent and maintain control through fear.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/mahfouda-bamba-lefkire/

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