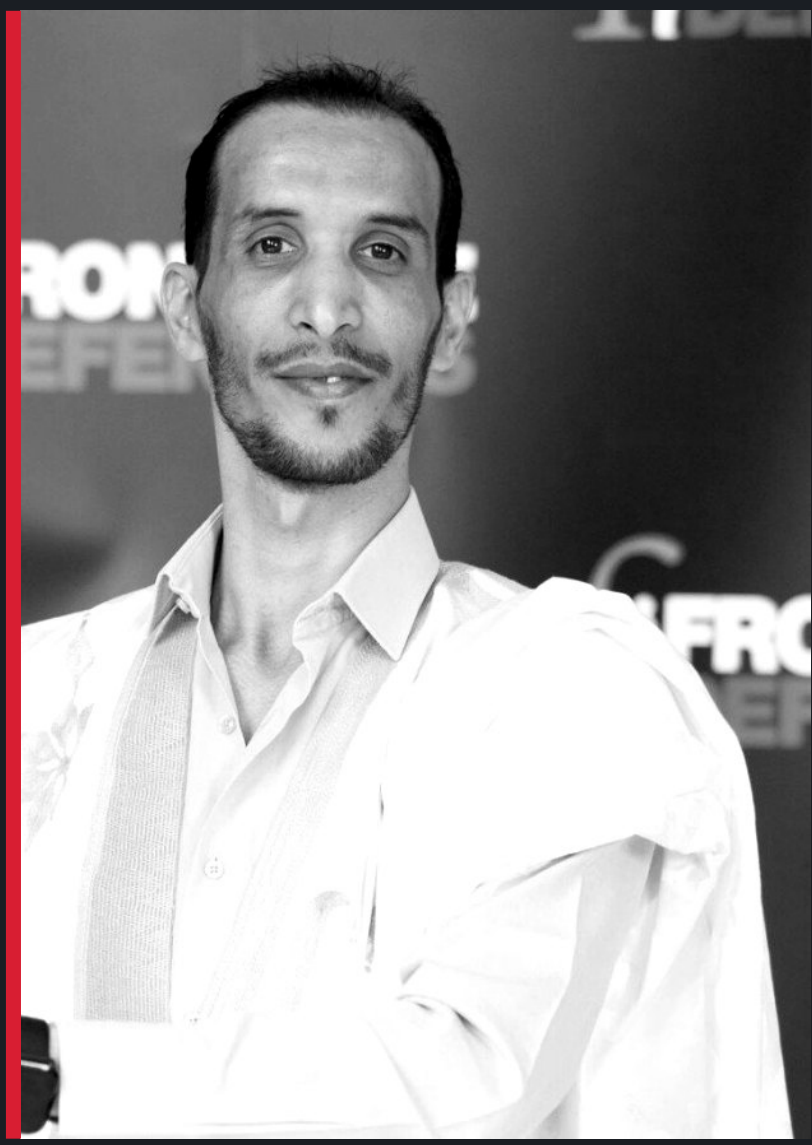

Advocacy dossier

# Mhamed Hali

امحمد الهالي

**At liberty** **Western Sahara**

Mhamed Hali holds a doctorate in international humanitarian law and is Secretary General of the Association for the Protection of Sahrawi Prisoners in Moroccan Prisons. Morocco has blocked him from practicing law because of his advocacy for self-determination in Western Sahara.

# 01
# The case at a glance

Mhamed Hali holds a doctorate in international humanitarian law and is Secretary General of the Association for the Protection of Sahrawi Prisoners in Moroccan Prisons. Morocco has blocked him from practicing law because of his advocacy for self-determination in Western Sahara.

| Status | Arrested | Country |
|---|---|---|
| **At liberty** | **2007** | **Western Sahara** |

## What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

**01** Quash the conviction and drop any charges that remain on record against Mhamed Hali in connection with peaceful human rights work.

**02** Confirm publicly that Mhamed Hali faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

**03** Guarantee that Mhamed Hali 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.

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

**Enforced disappearance** International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, Article 2
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 9, 16

**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

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

## 03

# How the case unfolded

**2007**

Start of enforced disappearance

### Abducted by Moroccan intelligence at the entrance to Laayoune

Moroccan intelligence agents abducted him at the entrance to Laayoune and held him without trial. He says he was tortured as punishment for his student activism.

**2007**

Release

### Released after eight days in secret detention

He was released after eight days, without being brought to trial.

**2009**

Physical assault

### Attacked by masked men in Marrakesh

Masked men attacked him in Marrakesh and threatened to kill him if he did not stop his activism. He filed a police complaint, which was never investigated.

**2012**

Physical assault

### Attacked by masked men in Rabat

He was attacked in Rabat in similar circumstances and threatened again. His police complaint was never investigated.

**October 2019**

Context

### Application to Agadir Bar Association

Mhamed Hali applied for membership in the Agadir Bar Association after completing the aptitude examination and fulfilling all statutory requirements under Moroccan Law 28.08.

**13 February 2020**

**Professional ban imposed**

### Bar membership rejected

The Agadir Bar Association rejected Hali's application based on an ethics investigation concluding he was unfit to practice law due to his membership in ASVDH and his political opinions supporting self-determination.

**4 October 2022**

**Other act**

### Two UN Special Rapporteurs raise his exclusion from the bar with Morocco

The Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression raised concerns with the Moroccan government about the Agadir Bar Association's refusal of his membership in communication AL MAR 3/2022.

**27 June 2024**

**Appeal: judgment upheld**

### Court of Cassation upholds exclusion

The Moroccan Court of Cassation upheld the bar association's decision, finalizing Hali's exclusion from the legal profession on discriminatory grounds.

**May 2025**

**Award or recognition**

### Receives the Front Line Defenders Award

He received the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk for the Middle East and North Africa, collected in Dublin.

**30 July 2025**

**Other act**

### Three UN Special Rapporteurs raise his exclusion from the bar with Morocco

The UN Special Rapporteurs on the independence of judges and lawyers, on freedom of opinion and expression and on human rights defenders wrote to the Moroccan government (AL MAR 5/2025) about the Court of Cassation ruling of 27 June 2024. They expressed deep concern that his exclusion appeared to be a reprisal for his freedom of expression and his work on the right to self-determination, rather than a response to any documented breach of professional ethics.

04

# The full story

**Update, 12 November 2026:** this record was checked a second time for 2025 and 2026 developments. Mhamed Hali remains at liberty and remains barred from practising law; Front Line Defenders' Global Analysis 2025/26 reports that Moroccan authorities continue to prevent him from practising, and no new detention or proceeding against him has been reported.

## Background and Work

Mhamed Hali is a human rights defender from Western Sahara who holds a doctorate in international humanitarian law. He serves as Secretary General of the Association for the Protection of Saharan Prisoners in Moroccan Prisons (LPPS), an organization that documents the detention conditions and legal treatment of Sahrawi prisoners held by Moroccan authorities. He is also a member of the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations Committed by the Moroccan State (ASVDH), which advocates for accountability and the right to self-determination for the people of Western Sahara.

Hali's work centers on legal protection and documentation. His organizations monitor trials, detention conditions, and patterns of persecution targeting Sahrawi human rights defenders. He has consistently and publicly supported the principle that the people of Western Sahara have a right to self-determination under international law, a position that has brought him into direct conflict with Moroccan state institutions.

He has paid for this activism since his student years. In 2007, Moroccan intelligence agents abducted him at the entrance to Laayoune and held him for more than a week without trial; he says he was tortured as punishment for his activism at university. In 2009 masked men attacked him in Marrakesh and threatened to kill him if he did not stop, and in 2012 he was attacked in Rabat in similar circumstances. His police complaints were never investigated. In May 2025 he received the Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

## The Application and Rejection

In October 2019, Hali applied for membership in the Agadir Bar Association. He had completed the bar aptitude examination, held Moroccan nationality, and submitted documentation showing no criminal record. Under Article 5 of Moroccan Law 28.08, which regulates admission to the legal profession, he met all formal requirements.

On 13 February 2020, the Agadir Bar Association rejected his application. The rejection rested on an investigation conducted under Article 11 of Law 28.08, which permits examination of an applicant's ethical conduct. The investigative report concluded that Hali was "not a person fit to practice" because he belonged to an organization "that denies Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara" and because "the concerned candidate is well known for his separatist and anti-territorial integrity attitudes."

The bar association did not dispute Hali's legal qualifications. It did not cite a criminal conviction, ethical misconduct in professional practice, or failure to meet statutory criteria. The sole basis for exclusion was his political opinion and

organizational affiliation.

## Appeal and Final Decision

Hali appealed the decision. He argued that his exclusion violated international legal protections for the independence of the legal profession. Article 10 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers prohibits discrimination against lawyers on the basis of political opinion. The principles require that governments and bar associations ensure equal access to the profession without regard to an applicant's political views or affiliations, except for nationality requirements.

On 27 June 2024, the Moroccan Court of Cassation upheld the Agadir Bar Association's original decision. Morocco's highest judicial authority affirmed that Hali could be barred from the legal profession because of his political opinions and his membership in human rights organizations advocating for self-determination in Western Sahara. The ruling finalized his exclusion and foreclosed any further domestic legal remedy.

## Broader Context of Persecution

Hali's case fits within a documented pattern of systematic targeting of Sahrawi human rights defenders by Moroccan authorities. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found that this pattern of persecution constitutes racial discrimination and aims to silence advocacy for the right to self-determination. Sahrawi defenders face travel bans, arbitrary detention, unfair trials in military courts, and obstruction of their professional and civil rights. Hali's exclusion from the bar is one mechanism among many used to limit the ability of Sahrawi advocates to operate within legal and institutional frameworks.

The ruling against Hali effectively criminalizes political opinion within the framework of professional regulation. By categorizing support for self-determination as evidence of unfitness to practice law, Moroccan judicial and professional bodies have converted bar admission into a tool of political control. Hali remains active in human rights documentation, but he has been permanently deprived of the right to represent clients, litigate cases, or practice the profession for which he trained.

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**Latest updates on this case** Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/mhamed-hali/

HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement is a non-governmental organisation documenting the situation of human rights defenders in the Middle East and North Africa. This file is based on the public record of the case in the defenders archive.Status as recorded on 2007. To report an error: archive@humena.org