

URGENT ACTION

RIF PROTESTORS FACING REPRISALS IN DETENTION

Protest leader Nasser Zefzafi and journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui remain in prolonged solitary confinement. Hunger-striking detainees are facing reprisals as their health continues to deteriorate. They face trial in Casablanca.

Moroccan authorities are keeping the leader of the Hirak popular protest movement **Nasser Zefzafi**, 37, as well as journalist **Hamid El Mahdaoui**, 38, in prolonged solitary confinement. Nasser Zefzafi has spent over 116 days in solitary confinement, while Hamid El Mahdaoui has been in solitary confinement since his arrest in July.

Nasser Zefzafi is detained in an individual cell in an empty wing of Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison, with half an hour of courtyard access twice a day. Hamid El Mahdaoui is also held in an individual cell with only half an hour of courtyard access daily, during which he is alone. Lack of meaningful contact with other detainees for at least 22 hours a day for more than 15 days constitutes prolonged solitary confinement, which amounts to torture or other ill-treatment, according to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Mandela Rules). The two men are among 54, including journalists, charged by the General Crown Prosecutor at the Casablanca Court of Appeals with offenses including undermining internal state security over largely peaceful social justice protests in Morocco's northern Rif region in 2017. Only a handful have been accused of specific acts of violence, their lawyer said, while most have been accused of "inciting" protests, rebellion and unrest, including on social media.

At least thirty-five detainees at Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison have been on hunger strike for between two and three weeks and their health is gradually deteriorating. Their demands include an end to ongoing arrests in the Rif, and the release of all those detained over the protests. Their lawyers filed a complaint regarding apparent reprisals against the hunger strikers when on 20 September prison guards reportedly filmed them on their smartphones and jeered them during an unannounced strip search after their weekly family visits. The hunger-strikers were also separated from each other, placed in closed cells and had their weekly calls to their families reduced or stopped. Their belongings were confiscated or damaged during cell searches. A number of detainees went on a dry hunger-strike for one week to protest the apparent reprisals.

1) TAKE ACTION

Write a letter, send an email, call, fax or tweet:

- Calling on the authorities to immediately end the detention of Nasser Zefzafi and Hamid El Mahdaoui in prolonged solitary confinement;
- Urging them to ensure that no reprisals are made against hunger strikers and ensure they have access to adequate medical care in line with medical ethics;
- Calling on them to immediately and unconditionally release all those detained for exercising freedom of expression, assembly.

Contact these two officials by 15 November, 2017:

Director of General Administration for Prison Administration and Reinsertion

Mohamed Saleh Tamek
Angle Avenue Arar et rue El-Jouz
Hay El Riyad, Rabat, Morocco
Fax: + 212 5 37 71 26 19

Salutation: Dear Sir

Ambassador Princess Lalia Jomala, Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco

1601 21st St. NW, Washington DC 20009
Phone: 202 462 7979 | Fax: 202 462 7643
Email: moroccointheUS@maec.gov.ma

Salutation: Dear Ambassador

2) LET US KNOW YOU TOOK ACTION

[Click here](#) to let us know if you took action on this case! *This is Urgent Action 229.17*

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 24 July, the Al Hoceima Court of First Instance convicted journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui of inciting others to take part in an unauthorized protest and sentenced him to three months' imprisonment and a fine of 20,000 Moroccan dirhams (about 2,100 US dollars), later increased to one year in prison on appeal on 12 September, following which he went on hunger strike for six days in protest. The case related to his statements on a public square in Al Hoceima on the eve of a large protest on 20 July 2017, which were filmed and circulated on social media. His conviction was a blatant breach of freedom of expression and assembly.

Aside from Nasser Zefzafi and Hamid El Mahdaoui, five others detained over the Rif protests were kept in prolonged solitary confinement. Mohamed Jelloul, Nabil Ahamjik, Mohamed El Majjaoui, Mohamed El Asrihi, and Khaled El Baraka, were kept in prolonged solitary confinement during nearly three months until the court concluded its investigation and they were moved to collective cells in August.

The Mandela Rules define solitary confinement as "the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact", and consider it as prolonged when in excess of 15 consecutive days. Solitary confinement does not need to be intended as punishment.

Fifty of the 54 charged by the Casablanca Court of Appeals over the Rif protests are detained at Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison, and four have been released pending trial. The overwhelming majority of detainees' families travel over 550 km from Al Hoceima and other localities in the Rif to Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison, also known as "Okacha" prison near Morocco's economic capital Casablanca. Trial hearings began on 12 September.

Hunger strikers among the Rif detainees include 35 in Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison. Their health has been steadily deteriorating, especially those who stopped drinking water for a week in protest of apparent reprisals against hunger-strikers during cell and strip-searches on 20 September in Ain Sbaa 1 Local Prison. Other Rif detainees held at three other prisons in Fes, Taza, Taourirt and Guercif are also on hunger strike.

Morocco's General Delegation for Penitentiary Administration and Reinsertion has repeatedly denied the hunger strikes in public, even though several detainees have already met judicial officials over their hunger strike and have been moved to the prison infirmary because of their deteriorating health. The authorities have the responsibility to ensure hunger-striking detainees have access to qualified medical professionals and adequate medical care.

The Rif popular movement, or Hirak, calls for social justice and improved public services in the long-marginalized northern region. Defence lawyers say many are facing trumped-up charges because of their peaceful protest, dissent, or online coverage of the demonstrations. Since May 2017, police have arrested hundreds of people over the Rif protests, many of them arbitrarily, including peaceful activists and some journalists. The overwhelming majority are in detention, and dozens have already been sentenced to prison terms of up to 20 years on protest-related charges.

For more information, see *Morocco: Dozens arrested over mass protests in Rif report torture in custody* (News story) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/08/morocco-dozens-arrested-over-mass-protests-in-rif-report-torture-in-custody/>

Name: Nasser Zefzafi (m), Hamid El Mahdouï (m), 35 anonymous (m)
Gender m/f: m

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