Ms. Ilze Brands Kehris, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights

Annual report of the Secretary-General on "Cooperation with the United Nations, its representatives and mechanisms in the field of human rights"

reprisals@ohchr.org

Individual case

COMPLAINANT: Aminatou Haidar

Represented by the Right Livelihood Award Foundation

AGAINST: Kingdom of Morocco

Date: 30 April 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 Identity of the complainant

Ms. Aminatou Haidar, born 1966, is a prominent human rights defender from Western Sahara who has been campaigning for over 30 years for the self-determination of the Sahrawi people and the respect of their fundamental rights. The entirety of her activism has occurred within the context of the illegal occupation of the territory of Western Sahara by the Kingdom of Morocco. During her peaceful activism, she has been a victim of enforced disappearance, she was detained without charges, beaten and tortured by Moroccan authorities. She was imprisoned from 1987 to 1991 and from 2005 to 2006 on charges related to her independence advocacy. In 2009, she attracted
international attention when she staged a hunger strike in Lanzarote Airport after being denied re-entry into Moroccan Western Sahara¹.

Despite the enormous psychological and physical suffering to which she has been subjected, she has continued to tirelessly fight for justice and the rights of her people. In 2019, she was awarded the Right Livelihood Award “for her steadfast nonviolent action, despite imprisonment and torture, in pursuit of justice and self-determination for the people of Western Sahara”.

1.2 Current situation/ Background

Haidar currently resides in El-Ayoun with her husband and her two children. She continues her non-violent activism in an extremely challenging environment, where there is no possibility to demonstrate, there is no freedom of expression, and any actions in favour of self-determination lead to arbitrary detention and mistreatments, including torture². After her release from prison in 2006 she has been regularly intimidated by Moroccan authorities. Just to mention two examples:

- In November 2012 she was beaten and threatened with a knife by the police on her way home from a meeting with the former Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General on Western Sahara, Mr Christopher Ross, in El Ayoun³.

- In April 2015, Moroccan police attacked Haidar’s home with rocks as she hosted a meeting with UN representatives.

Haidar is suffering from health problems that relate to the years of imprisonment and the torture she was subjected to.

2. Statement of the case

On 2 January 2020, just after Haidar returned to Western Sahara from a trip celebrating the reception of the Right Livelihood Award in Zurich, Berlin, Stockholm, and Geneva, the Moroccan police prevented representatives of Sahrawi NGOs from celebrating her. This happened as she met

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¹ See S/2010/175, para 7.
² Morocco is party to the Convention against Torture.
with UN representatives in Geneva, including former Deputy High Commissioner Kate Gilmore in Geneva, on the 29th November.

The celebration took place at the headquarters of the Sahrawi Association of Victims of Grave Violations of Human Rights Committed by the State of Morocco (ASVDH) in El-Ayoun, the occupied capital of Western Sahara. However, authorities denied the activists access to the venue and forced all those present to leave. During the following days, in an attempt to further intimidate her, the Moroccan police force maintained a siege on Haidar’s residence, as well as the whole neighborhood.

A few days later, on 11 January 2020, Haidar was attacked once again by Moroccan police officers while she was trying to attend a meeting with her fellow human rights defender Galia Djimi, to evaluate the results of the 15th Congress of the Polisario Front. She reported that while she was leaving her house to reach the meeting location, police officers verbally insulted her and her children, pushed her to the ground, and punched her in the chest and neck. On the same day other activists also report having been violently beaten. As a consequence of these attacks, Haidar has suffered serious damage to her knee, which she has since been treating in Madrid.

Furthermore, Haidar travelled to Geneva in February 2020 on the occasion of the 43rd session of the Human Right Council to meet with UN representatives, including High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet, and to engage with them by delivering an oral statement and participating in a side event as a panelist. While in attendance, she has repeatedly been approached by Moroccan diplomats, who followed her throughout the building during the all week.

We argue that the aforementioned actions undertaken by the Moroccan authorities amount to a form of reprisals for Haidar human rights activism, as an attempt to intimidate her and discourage her from pursuing her advocacy work.

In this regard, we wish to highlight that these retaliations take place within the context of a pattern of serious and systematic violations of the rights of Sahrawi people, including the rights to self-determination and independence. Numerous activists suffer daily from the Moroccan repression, by being subjected to torture, cruel and degrading treatment, arbitrary detention, unfair trials, expulsion from work, forced deportation to Moroccan cities, and defamation by Moroccan press, among others. The access of international observers to the occupied territories is regularly denied.

### 3. Conclusions and requests

In light of the above, the Right Livelihood Foundation kindly request that you:

- call on the Moroccan authorities to end this continuous pattern of intimidation and harassment against Haidar and all Sahrawi human rights defenders
- take all the necessary steps to ensure that their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly be respected, without fear of reprisals and intimidation

- raise the issue of these violations with the Moroccan authorities, by requesting official visits to the occupied territories of Western Sahara, and to implement independent and credible measures to ensure the full respect of human rights in the territory.