



December 09, 2021

H.E. Michelle Bachelet  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Palais Wilson  
52 rue des Pâquis  
CH-1201 Geneva, Switzerland

(via email: [mbachelet@ohchr.org](mailto:mbachelet@ohchr.org))

Dear High Commissioner,

As the world celebrates the universal declaration of human rights, we, members of the Sahrawi Association Against Impunity in Tindouf Camps (ASIMCAT), a non-governmental organization based in Spain that speaks for the victims of gross human rights violations perpetrated by Frente Polisario in Tindouf refugee camps and their relatives, south-west Algeria, would like to draw with deep concern the attention of your Excellency and the whole international community over the dangerous deterioration of human rights situation in Tindouf camps, where these violations reached a peak after the decision of the Polisario to withdraw from the ceasefire agreements on November 13, 2020.

In fact, Tindouf camps have always been the scene of systematic violations of the rights of a population deprived of any protection and access to Algerian justice or any independent and efficient recourse mechanisms against their torturers who benefit from total impunity, due to the refusal of the host country to assume its legal responsibilities, and unwillingness to fulfill its international obligations in accordance with international law.

The UN Human Rights Committee, in its concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Algeria, has expressed its deep concerns over Algeria's "de facto devolution of authority to the Frente Polisario, especially jurisdictional authority", which is considered as inconsistent with the State party's obligation to respect and guarantee all rights for all persons within its territory (CCPR/C/DZA/CO/4, para. 9).

In this regard, we would like to highlight the trend of violations in Tindouf camps, including, among others, enforced disappearance, extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary detentions, child soldiering and the diversion of humanitarian aids, which the camps population is witnessing under a totalitarian leadership in place imposing on them a tight siege since the mid-seventies; a siege that worsened under the pretext of the fight against the pandemic of "covid-19".

ASIMCAT has undertaken research on enforced disappearance since the inception of Tindouf camps, and came out with a preliminary list of 131 Sahrawi victims of enforced disappearances in the secret detention centers run by the Polisario, which witnessed crimes against these Sahrawi civilians, who have gone missing, and are still unaccounted for.

These crimes have been acknowledged by many Polisario leaders, who made public testimonies on social media, pleading guilty of the grave violations that were perpetrated in the secret detention centers in the Sahrawi refugee camps. These leaders confessed that they were among the persons who stood behind the torture and the disappearance of many Sahrawis. Their testimonies are of paramount importance in building for accountability, since they openly

establish the full criminal responsibility of the perpetrators of these crimes and of the host country, and confirm what previously has been reported by Amnesty International, France Libertés and Human Rights Watch.

The right to life continues to be beleaguered in the Tindouf camps, as evidenced by the systematic extrajudicial execution by the Algerian army of every Saharawi who tries to break the imposed siege. In this regard, two young Sahrawis were burned alive by Algerian militaries near Dakhla camp in October 2020 and 03 others were shot dead by the Algerian army in the outskirts of the camps during the last week of November 2021. This shows the uptick in the past two years in attacks on Sahrawi young refugees, noting that despite the increasing number of sahrawis killed by Algerian army, they still go uninvestigated while impunity runs rife. No measures have been taken to ensure thorough, impartial and effective investigations and the prosecution of all these crimes, despite the communication addressed to the Algerian government by UN mandate holders, including the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions (see UNSG report: S/2021/843, p. 78).

Arbitrary detention is also a longstanding practice aiming to eradicate any form of opposition or dissent in Tindouf camps. The Polisario leadership carries out a fierce campaign of repression against bloggers and opinion leaders in Tindouf, in an intentional attempt to silence the dissident voices who criticize its political attitude or the depravity marking their camp management (See the WGAD opinion: A/HRC/WGAD/2020/7, regarding the opponent Fadel Breika). These civil activists are also subjected to various forms of reprisal from Polisario, including smear campaigns and the cut-off of supply of both electricity and water, together with other necessary humanitarian aids, for their engagement with the UN human rights system.

The Tindouf camps are a blatant illustration of the denial of freedoms of expression, association and movement for an entire generation of Sahrawi. Although these freedoms are matched only by the right to life and are the very foundation for the exercise and full enjoyment of all other rights, the founding status of the Polisario exerts the worst restrictions on these freedoms, by banning the creation of non-governmental organizations or free medias in the camps, and imposes the Polisario political structure as the only umbrella organization for all the camps population (see articles 31 and 32 of the Polisario constitution).

Sahrawi women, one of the most vulnerable categories in the camps, face the worst human rights violations from the Polisario leadership. They are victims of sexual violence, early and forced marriages, sexual exploitation, rape and forced pregnancy, in addition to the psychological woes relating to the enrollment of their children at an early age in the armed militias of the "Polisario", and sending them far from their families to certain Latin American countries (Cuba, Venezuela, etc.) for military training and Marxist ideological indoctrination, in defiance of UN resolutions, including resolution N° 13.25 (2000) and N° 2493 (2019), calling, respectively, for the protection of women against sexual abuse and assault in crisis situations and for the promotion of the civil, political and economic rights of this extremely fragile category.

The situation of children in the Tindouf camps has worsened since the decision of the Polisario leadership to withdraw from the ceasefire agreements on November 13th, 2020, leading to a massive campaign to enroll children in the armed militia of the Polisario, sending them to Algerian military barracks to undergo military training while their place is on school benches. This campaign was also marked by the organization by the leaders of the Polisario of oratory meetings in the camps, inciting violence and hatred, and calling for the perpetration of terrorist acts inside the kingdom of Morocco.

Slavery is another inhumane practice in Tindouf camps, first brought to the attention of the international community by two Australian journalists, who visited the camps, and were shocked by the fact that 7,000 black Sahrawis pejoratively called "haratines" had been deprived from their right to access to humanitarian aids, only because of their skin colour. As soon as this sordid reality was revealed, the Polisario militias arrested these two journalists, before releasing them under pressure from international organizations, in particular "Reporters Sans Frontieres-RSF", which on this occasion denounced the persistence of slavery practices by the polisario.

These abject practices of slavery by the leaders of the Polisario were also exposed by "Human Rights Watch" in its reports of 2008 and 2013, where this NGO documented the testimonies of people of colour, having confirmed the suffering of black people, including those who are disgracefully subjugated by notables who force them to housework and breeding.

In the face of these heinous actions by the leaders of the Polisario, of whom the quasi-majority have slaves to carry out domestic work and grazing of their cattle, young melanoderms in Tindouf camps joined an informal civil platform called " Freedom and Progress Association for the Fight Against Slavery", which was able to identify the existence in the camps of 7130 "non-freed slaves", including women, who are raped, married against their will and sent to the desert to take care of their masters' herds. This NGO specified in this regard, that 09 women of colour died during their childbirth without medical assistance in the middle of the desert, and 03 other "slaves" died of thirst.

Failure to uphold the fundamental rights of Sahrawis in Tindouf camps exposes them to more violations. This not only has dire consequences for these Sahrawi civilians, but also undermines our efforts to end impunity in these camps. Making the human rights situation in Tindouf camps one of your primary concerns would send a strong signal and give a push to the endeavors of the families of the victims and human rights organizations in their struggle against impunity in the camps.

Hoping that our letter will hold your attention, please accept our sincerest gratitude and appreciation for the enormous work you do each day as the world's collective human rights conscience.

*Yours Sincerely*  
*Lemaadla Mohamed Salem Zrug*  
*President of ASIMCAT*

N.B: Copy sent to Mr. Antonio Gutterres, UN Secretary General, through Mr. Alexander Ivanko Special Representative of the UNSG and head of MINURSO.