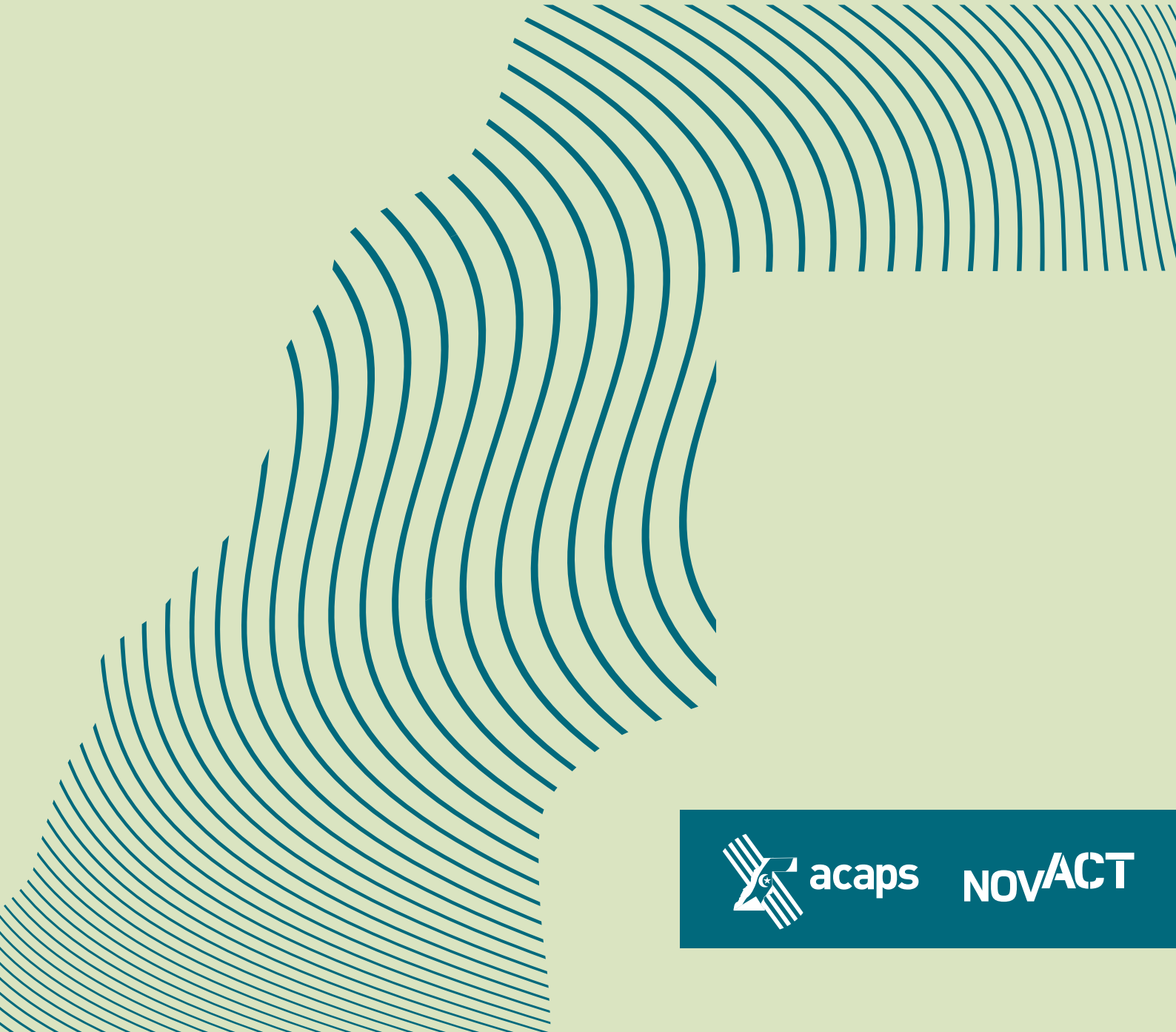


EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Voices breaking free from repression



HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN
OCCUPIED WESTERN SAHARA
DOCUMENTED DURING 2024



The current scenario of erosion of the legitimacy of the international architecture for the protection of human rights and the questioning of the effectiveness of international law, following the genocide in Palestine, also has an impact on Western Sahara. Since 1963, Western Sahara has been designated by the United Nations as a non-self-governing territory with the right to self-determination, in accordance with UN resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV). The referendum promised in 1991 was never held and Morocco continues to occupy approximately 75% of the territory of Western Sahara. Although the United Nations General Assembly or the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have called in recent years to respect the commitment to the right to self-determination of the Saharawi people, countries central to the process of conflict resolution, such as France, recently joined the dynamic led by the United States, Israel and Spain, to **disregard international law and openly support the illegal occupation by force and plunder**. The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency raises fears of a new turn of the screw in this dynamic, in the heat of the economic and commercial interests that exist between this country and Morocco.

This double route of occupation, military, police and administrative, on the one hand, and economic on the other, has intensified in an extreme way during 2024, to the point that, in a good part of the hundred or so violations included in this report, a direct link can be established between the victimizing facts and the commercial interests of Moroccan and international companies, especially European ones. Especially with regard to the growing dynamics of destruction of property, theft and expropriation of land from the Saharawi people, forced displacement, impoverishment and economic discrimination and cultural annihilation that has been occurring throughout the Occupied Territory.

Thus, Morocco is rapidly expanding the use and consumption of land and water for agricultural cultivation for export and for the development of the tourism industry in areas such as Dakhla. The extraction of resources in non-self-governing territories without the explicit consent of their population is **considered illegal under international law**, since the exploitation of natural resources in territories under this status should only take place in **accordance with Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)**, and always in accordance with the wishes and interests of the population that legally owns their usufruct. In this line, in October 2024, the Court of Justice of the European Union confirmed the annulment of the 2019 EU-Morocco Trade Agreements on fisheries and agricultural products, arguing that “the people of Western Sahara did not give their consent and they were concluded in violation of the principles of self-determination and of the relative effect of treaties”.

Based on the documented violations, the report presents the following trends and most noteworthy cases:

- » In the report of the United Nations Secretary General to the Security Council of October 2024, it is warned that **the situation of violation of human rights is progressively worsening**, “which points to a growing narrowing of the civic space¹ “. This trend is confirmed by the present report, which lists **some one hundred human rights violations perpetrated in 2024 against the Saharawi population**, with a particular viciousness towards human rights defenders, activists and journalists. A good part of these are related to civil and political rights and take the form of arbitrary arrests, trials

1. Report of the Secretary-General to the United Nations Security Council, resolution S/2024/707 (01/10/2024). “Situation concerning Western Sahara Report of the Secretary-General.” https://minurso.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/sg_report_on_the_situation_concerning_western_sahara_1_october_2024.pdf

without guarantees, attacks on political freedoms (assembly, association, expression), coercion to free movement within and outside the territory and total suppression of freedom of information. All this occurred, moreover, while Morocco held the presidency of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

- » Among all the human rights violations reported, **56 are related to the general deterioration of the situation of the Saharawi prisoners**, who continue to be imprisoned despite successive opinions of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Morocco continues to use long sentences, imposed in unfair trials, as a means of punishing activists and their families, in addition to subjecting them to a continuous dynamic of denial of basic rights, degrading treatment and physical, psychological and verbal abuse, from the moment of arrest and throughout their deprivation of liberty. In 2024, the Saharawi prisoners have carried out **13 hunger strikes to denounce the conditions of imprisonment**. hunger strike launched by **Abdeljalil Laaroussi** on October 16, 2024, after three weeks in a hospital in Rabat without medical care, stands out.
- » November 2024 saw **the death in police custody of the Saharawi citizen Omar Abdelmajid**, who had already been reprisalized for speaking out in favor of the Polisario Front and against the occupation. In addition to being beaten and arrested, according to witnesses, during his detention, the authorities avoided duly informing the family of his whereabouts and condition for four days, until they received a call from the hospital of El Ayoun communicating that he had been admitted dead. The circumstances and causes of Abdelmajid's death remain unclear and have not been properly investigated.

- » Arbitrary arrests and detentions have continued to be, in the year 2024, a systematic reprisal against Saharawi activists for their political activity, in many cases accompanied by violence and physical aggression. During this year, **14 persons have been arrested or detained**, hitting with particular ferocity young university students, as well as Saharawi journalists. One of the most serious situations is the persecution of the coordinator of Équipe Media **Mohamed Mayara**, arrested and assaulted several times in 2024 for his professional practice. In one case, a premeditated attack by plainclothes officers caused the journalist several serious injuries to his head, face and mouth.
- » In 2024, the repression against members of Équipe Media such as Mayara, **Ahmed Ettanji** and **Hassan Zerouali**, as well as against SADR TV correspondent **Salha Boutanguiza**, intensified. Moreover, Morocco expelled 5 European activists and journalists from the Occupied Territories in 2024, while - between January and February 2025 - 8 journalists, parliamentarians and activists from Spain were also expelled.
- » The wave of repression of the Saharawi university student movement in Agadir has targeted more than twenty young people and resulted in 6 arrests and judicial proceedings. The most serious case is that of **Elhoucine Bourakba** and **Ayman Elyatribi**, arrested on 23 January and 12 March 2024 and recently sentenced by the Court of Appeal of Agadir to two years in prison. During the trial, both young men assured the judge that they had suffered torture and physical violence during their detention.
- » **Violent repression of protests and rallies** in the streets of the main occupied cities continues, especially directed against women, in most cases with vio-

lence and verbal abuse. Many of them denounce that, during the demonstrations, they are subjected to public humiliation, such as the stripping of their traditional dress (melhfas). In addition to physical abuse, Saharawi women are increasingly subjected to defamation campaigns on social networks, where trolls linked to the Moroccan administration spread disinformation aimed at attacking their reputation and undermining their position within the community. Added to this is the mass surveillance of the online activities and communications of people the state perceives as a threat.

- » During 2024, the practice of siege and constant surveillance of homes was carried out **in up to 17 cases**, for periods ranging from a few days to a whole month, in order to generate a state of intimidation and daily fear, to hinder the collective life of the Saharawi population and to prevent and punish political meetings. The cases of **Abderrahman Zayou**, former political prisoner and president of the LPPS, and **of Lahcen Dalil**, president of the Saharawi Observatory of Natural Resources (AREN), who denounced having been under house arrest for 23 days, stand out. The president of CODESA, **Ali Salem Tamek**, had the meter supplying electricity to his home broken during a raid to prevent a private meeting.
- » Restrictions on freedom of movement and movement have materialized in the form of limitations on activists entering or leaving the Occupied Territories and moving to other cities or municipalities within the territory. Or even within the same city, through police cordons, attacks and physical aggressions and arbitrary arrests. **Airports appear this year as areas of particular risk** for the violation of the right to freedom of movement of Saharawi people, whether in the occupied territory or in European airports.

- » The creation and activity of Saharawi associations and organizations for the defense of human rights continues to be prevented. The wide scope of criminalization also prevents grassroots associations from being legalized and from receiving any external funding for their work and, frequently, the people who are part of them are punished with the loss of their jobs and financial strangulation, jeopardizing their support and that of their families.

In 2024, violations of economic, social and cultural rights, in the form of forced expropriation of land, destruction of housing and livelihoods and forced displacement, are taking on a pressing relevance. This intensification of harassment, tourist gentrification and forced displacement of the Saharawi population may be the beginning of a dynamic of expulsion in the southern region of the Occupied Territories. In cities such as Dakhla, this dynamic has been accompanied by an intensification of repression, particularly focused on individual activists under constant surveillance, such as the journalist of Équipe Media and human rights defender **Hassan Zerouali**, 24 years old.

The Saharawi population continues to suffer, in addition, a much higher rate of unemployment, lack of access to economic means, economic and labor reprisals against those who publicly defend the Saharawi cause and repression of labor and union organization. One of the most notable cases is that of the lawyer and advocate **Amhamed Hali**, who continues to be banned from practicing law because of his political views. Hali was denied admission to the Agadir Bar in 2019, after which he filed an appeal. In June 2024, the Court of Cassation upheld the Agadir Bar Association's decision to ban the Saharawi lawyer from practicing.

The objective of this report is to offer a rigorous testimony of the systematic and

serious violations of the human rights of the protected population of the Saharawi Territories under Moroccan occupation and of the systematic and serious violations of the norms of international humanitarian law. The report concludes with a series of recommendations addressed to the international community as a whole (States, regional organizations and UN) with the intention of promoting the assumption of responsibilities, to ensure the application of international law in the territory and that the Saharawi people can freely exercise their fundamental rights.



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