

Spain: Unions protest for Western Sahara

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The crackdown by Moroccan occupation forces on the protest camp at Gdeim Izik on November 8 may have brought more attention to the plight of Western Sahara than was intended.

The 20,000-strong camp at Gdeim Izik, 15 km from the Western Saharan capital, El Aaiun, was established on October 9 to protest against the discrimination and oppression experienced by Saharawi people living under Moroccan occupation.

In a November 11 statement, Amnesty International quoted witnesses as saying that the security forces forced their way in, beating people and using tear gas and water cannons to push them out of tents, which were then set alight or bulldozed.

Information from Western Sahara is starting to filter out. A young activist, who cannot be named for security reasons, spoke to Green Left Weekly after she was detained in the round-ups that followed the attack on the Gdeim Izik camp.

Before her release, she was held at the Citizen House, a former healthcare facility used by the Moroccan occupation forces as a site for detention and torture.

“After hours of detention in the Citizen House, I was transferred with dozens of other Saharawi detainees at five o’clock in the afternoon in police cars”, she said.

“I could see traces of torture and ill-treatment on the bodies and faces of these detainees and I was able to identify one of them, a young Saharawi man named Aliyen Toubali.”

While blindfolded, she also identified the names of Hakima (who, judging by her voice, was a young girl), Mohamed Ndour, Salek Daoudi, Mustapha Arrami and Brahim Khalil.

Many Saharawi have disappeared in the past, making these records important to tracing their last movements and holding to account those responsible for crimes against humanity.

Morocco has announced that it will try more than 100 Saharawi activists in a military court. They will join the growing number of peace activists that are waiting to be charged, or for their case to be heard.

One such case is the Casablanca Seven, who had their trial dates changed constantly to stop foreign observers coming to witness the proceedings.

South Africa, Venezuela and Cuba have released public statements condemning the actions of Morocco.

An estimated 100,000 people demonstrated in Madrid on November 13, including actor Javier Bardem and the leaders of Spain’s two largest trade union federations, the UGT and CCOO.

Members of political parties from the conservative Peoples’ Party to the United Left joined in the march. Participants called for Spain to intervene in its former colony and Morocco to be held

accountable for the death and destruction it has perpetrated.

Head of the CCOO union federation Ignacio Fernández Toxo criticised Spain's government for "staying out of" the Western Sahara conflict and said it "can no longer ignore its responsibilities".

Paul Romeva, a Spanish MEP for the Greens told a November 16 European Parliament hearing that "We will not accept an EU fisheries accord with Morocco if it includes water of Western Sahara", Reuters said on November 17.

The UN held an emergency meeting about Western Sahara on November 16. The department of peacekeeping operations reported in camera to the Security Council. Its mission on the ground, MINURSO, had very limited first-hand information, it said at a press briefing.

By Ron Guy

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