

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
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1 April 2022

Dear Minister,

### **Saharawi human rights defender**

The Australian Union movement is extremely concerned at the situation of Saharawi human rights defender Sultana Khaya, who has been prevented by Moroccan authorities from leaving her house in occupied Western Sahara since November 2020. Khaya travelled to Australia in 2015 to speak at a conference seeking solutions to the exploitation of Western Saharan resources which was co-sponsored by Union Aid Abroad APHEDA and supported by the ACTU. Her work focuses on women's rights and promoting the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people: she is the President of the organisation League for the Defence of Human Rights and against Plunder of Natural Resources, and a member of the Saharawi Organ against the Moroccan Occupation (ISACOM), founded in September 2020 to advocate for the right of non-violent self-determination and the release of Saharawi political prisoners.

She has been repeatedly harassed by Moroccan authorities and lost an eye when attacked by a police officer in 2007, and since November 2020 Khaya, along with her sister and mother, has been prevented from leaving her house. Any time she has tried to leave the house, she has been threatened and physically attacked by police officers. Moroccan authorities have raided the house several times in May and August 2021, with herself and her sister physically and sexually harassed and raped by Moroccan agents in front of their mother. Law enforcement officials continue to be stationed outside her house, without any legal explanation for their presence.

The Moroccan Government has targeted activists like Khaya for their peaceful work in advocating for an independent Western Sahara. The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders has condemned the reprisals against Khaya and expressed particular concern about the apparent use of violence and the threat of violence to prevent and obstruct women human rights defenders in their peaceful human rights activities in Western Sahara.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Union movement is a longstanding supporter of self-determination for Western Sahara, and we continue to be concerned about the serious human rights abuses suffered by the Saharawi people. We request the Australian Government make representations to the Moroccan Government regarding Khaya's case to ensure her human rights are respected and call on the Moroccan Government

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/07/morocco-un-human-rights-expert-decries-clampdown-human-rights-defenders?LangID=E&NewsID=27244#:~:text=Lawlor%20also%20expressed%20particular%20concern,call%20was%20endorsed%20by%20Mr.>

to respect human rights in the Saharawi occupied territories and immediately release all Saharawi political detainees.

We urge the Australian Government to call on the United Nations to proceed without delay in organising the long overdue referendum on self-determination and expand the UN mission mandate in Western Sahara to include human rights monitoring.

Yours sincerely



Michele O'Neil  
**ACTU President**

**CC:**

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