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# The "Disappeared" in Morocco

## INTRODUCTION

A former member of the national resistance army "disappears" in February 1963. A detainee in a torture centre in Rabat sees him in April the same year. After that he is never seen again.

A trade unionist "disappears" from his room in October 1964. The only evidence of his departure are some bloodstains. He is reportedly sighted in secret detention centres in 1979, 1983 and 1989.

A trade unionist in exile in Libya "disappears" on a visit to Tunisia in 1973. There is a strong suspicion that he was kidnapped by the Moroccan security forces. This is confirmed when in July 1975 "Wanted" notices are put up for him and his family's houses are surrounded by police. He had escaped from secret detention with seven other "disappeared" only to be recaptured five days later. He has never been seen since.

A Sahrawi woman, the mother of two children, is arrested by Moroccan security forces in Laayoune in 1976. She has never been seen since.

These are only four examples of the more than 500 cases of individuals who have been arrested during the past 30 years and have never been seen since.

Since the early 1960s the Moroccan Government has used a system of "disappearance" in secret detention as a means of punishing certain suspected political opponents. Those who "disappear" have been held for years, cut off from the outside world in secret detention centres: villas, camps, isolated farms, and old forts. Many of the "disappeared" have died in secret detention; they have been buried hastily and secretly in the courtyards of their detention centres. Their families are never informed and no inquiry is held.

In recent years, there have been positive changes. The practice of "disappearance" appears to have stopped - Amnesty International has received no well-attested evidence of "disappearance" since 1988. In 1991 about 270 men and women who had "disappeared" for up to 19 years were released at the time of a world-wide campaign against human rights violations in Morocco.

But hundreds of former "disappeared" remain unaccounted for. Their families continue, year after year, to make the rounds of prisons and to write to the authorities. The Moroccan Government denies knowledge of them just as, for years, it denied secretly detaining the 270 "disappeared" released in 1991. Amnesty International believes that the

majority of the "disappeared" may still be alive, hidden away in secret cells, in an isolated farm, or in a villa in a smart quarter of Rabat.

Some may be dead. The names are now known of 48 Sahrawis, detained in secret centres at Qal'at M'gouna and Laayoune, who died between 1976 and 1990. Thirty-one out of the 58 military men taken in 1973 to the secret prison of Tazmamert died. No inquiry has ever been conducted into the deaths of those who have died while "disappeared".

Others have been released. Occasionally, those who have "disappeared" over the years have been set free. One member of the auxiliary forces who "disappeared" in 1973 was discovered doing forced labour on a remote farm in 1979; students who vanished in 1976 were released without warning or explanation in 1984; other students who "disappeared" in 1981 were freed in 1983 and 1984. Those released in 1991 included the "disappeared" wife, cousin and six children (the youngest only three at the time of his "disappearance") of a former Minister of the Interior, General Mohamed Oufkir, who died in mysterious circumstances in 1972; more than 260 people of Western Saharan origin "disappeared" after they were arrested between 1975 and 1987; and three brothers, held in secret villas in Rabat and then transferred to the secret detention centre of Tazmamert, who had "disappeared" in 1973. Twenty-seven members of the armed forces, the ones who survived out of the 58 transferred there in 1973, were also released from Tazmamert in 1991.

However, those who are return from "disappearance" are only partially set free. They are told to forget what happened and never to talk about it. Their movements are restricted and their contacts with others monitored. They may be unable to take any paid employment. If they talk to outsiders about their experiences, they risk rearrest. As one Sahrawi former "disappeared" said, they exchange a lesser prison for a greater one. Only a few, mostly those who have managed to leave the country, have been able to talk about the time they were "disappeared".

Everyone who has "disappeared" and been released has suffered physical or psychological damage from the years spent in secret detention. No compensation has been paid and most have not obtained adequate medical treatment. No official inquiry was ever held into the deaths of more than 80 people in secret jails. Buried hastily and carelessly by their guards, their names were remembered only by their fellow-prisoners. Their families have never been officially informed or compensated for their loss, nor has any official inquiry ever been held into why these people were detained incommunicado in harsh conditions for so many years.

Amnesty International's information comes from those who have "disappeared" and have been released, from the families and lawyers of those still missing, from the rare letters smuggled out of secret centres, from former members of the security forces, and from

human rights activists. Through the testimonies of the "disappeared" who have been set free and case histories of those still inside, Amnesty International hopes to help pierce the wall of silence which allows the "disappeared" to remain forgotten by the world and to encourage the Moroccan authorities finally to end the practice of "disappearances" once and for all.

## THE PHENOMENON OF "DISAPPEARANCES" IN MOROCCO

One purpose of "disappearance" is to imprison - or eliminate - people against whom the state can either bring no legal charges or else could bring charges but is reluctant to pursue them in court. But "disappearance" as employed in Morocco is also used to create an atmosphere of fear. For the victim's family, "disappearance" may be a greater punishment than execution. For death spells the end of the matter, grief heals and life resumes, but "disappearance" punishes a whole family forever - or for as long as the "disappearance" lasts. A soldier who plans a *coup d'état* may know he faces death; but he may be less willing to face the slow death of Tazmamert, or, like General Oufkir, for his whole family (including his small children) to be detained incommunicado, perhaps until they grow old and die, perhaps in harsh conditions.

Most "disappearances" appear to have occurred at times when the Moroccan state was believed to be threatened by internal or external opposition, especially during the 1970s. The internal opponents of the Moroccan state system who have "disappeared" into secret detention have included not only the supporters of *coups d'état* of the early 1970s, but also activists in opposition parties of the left, trade unions or even poor farmers who have led demonstrations in rural areas.

The majority of "disappearance" victims have been people of Western Saharan origin. More than 200 were reported to have "disappeared" in the year following Morocco's annexation of the Western Sahara in November 1975. Most of them are thought to have "disappeared" because they or members of their families were believed to support the Polisario Front's call for independence. The total number of those who have "disappeared" is not known. Numbers on some of the lists of the Polisario Front and other organizations may be exaggerated but they have also left out names of those known later to have "disappeared". Amnesty International believes that, including temporary "disappearances", over 1000 Sahrawis have "disappeared" after arrest over the past 15 years. Many were held in temporary detention and released after spending months or years incommunicado. More than 260 were freed in June 1991, but up to 500 may still be "disappeared" in secret detention.

"Disappearances" were more common in the 1970s and 1980s, when *garde à vue* detention in political cases was often allowed to exceed a year. Since 1984 "disappearances" have been infrequent, at least in the case of Moroccans. There is no well-attested case of "disappearance" since 1988, when some Sahrawi detainees arrested that year "disappeared" in secret detention in Skoura and in Qal'at M'gouna. However, the authorities' hold over information in Western Sahara and southern Morocco is such that the "disappearance" of some of these was only known after their release in June 1991. It is likely that later cases of "disappearance" may still come to light in Morocco. As the plan of Qal'at M'gouna shows, one building was constructed only in 1991, a few months before the release of all but two of the prison's inmates after a world-wide campaign. The secret prison itself remains, unvisited by inspectors.

It is not always clear - especially in certain unresolved cases - just why particular individuals have "disappeared" after arrest. Usually the "disappeared" have been political opponents of the government (or their close relations), but there seems no reason why five left-wing students, for instance, should have "disappeared" for more than eight years while 178 others belonging to the same group were brought to trial. Members of certain branches of the security services who have helped other "disappeared" or who are themselves suspected of some form of disloyalty have also "disappeared". A Lebanese and a Libyan, still "disappeared" in secret unacknowledged detention, may have been spies or double agents. Occasionally, mere personal jealousy seems to have prompted a "disappearance".

## INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 states:

"No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile".

For 30 years the Moroccan authorities have disregarded this basic international human rights principle.

The right to security from arbitrary arrest and secret detention is clearly stated in Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ratified by the Moroccan Government in 1979:

"1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one

shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law...

"3. Anyone arrested or detained on a criminal charge shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or release..."

By allowing hundreds of individuals to be arbitrarily detained for years without charge or trial, without access to family, and in contravention of, or without access to, normal judicial procedure, lawyers and judges, the Moroccan Government has transgressed this article.

In 1978 the UN General Assembly passed a Resolution on Disappeared Persons which stressed the danger to life and liberty of the "disappeared" and the "anguish and sorrow that such circumstances cause to the relatives of disappeared persons. This Resolution was reinforced by the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 18 December 1992 without a vote. As a member of the United Nations and as a party to this Declaration, Morocco is bound to enforce its decisions. Article 1 states:

"1. Any act of enforced disappearance is an offence to human dignity. It is condemned as a denial of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and as a grave and flagrant violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...

"2. Such an act of enforced disappearance places the persons subjected thereto outside the protection of the law and inflicts severe suffering on them and their families. It constitutes a violation of the rules of international law guaranteeing, *inter alia*, the right to recognition before the law, the right to liberty and security of the person and the right not to be subjected to torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. It also violates or constitutes a grave threat to the right to life."

Article 2 states that

"1. No State shall practise, permit or tolerate enforced disappearance.

"2. States shall act at the national and regional levels and in cooperation with the United Nations to contribute by all means to the prevention and eradication of enforced disappearance."

Amnesty International calls on the Moroccan Government to cooperate with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances to investigate and end the system of enforced "disappearances" in Morocco.

Article 10 provides that all persons should be held only in a recognized place of detention; information on places of detention should be made promptly available to family members and lawyers, who should have access to registers to be maintained in all places of detention and, in addition, "each State shall take steps to maintain centralised registers" (Article 10(3)).

Article 13 gives the right for any complaint to be investigated:

" 1. Each State shall ensure that any person having knowledge or a legitimate interest who alleges that a person has been subjected to enforced disappearance has the right to complain to a competent and independent State authority and to have that complaint promptly, thoroughly and impartially investigated."

Under the terms of the same Article, the state should refer a possible disappearance even for an investigation whenever there are

"reasonable grounds to believe that an enforced disappearance has been committed even if there has been no formal complaint. No measure shall be taken to curtail or impede the investigation".

The authority should have the powers "to conduct the investigation effectively, including powers to compel attendance of witnesses and production of relevant documents and to make immediate on-site visits". All participants in the investigation should be protected against intimidation or reprisal (Article 13(3)); the findings of such an investigation should be made available to all persons concerned unless it jeopardises an ongoing criminal investigation, (Article 13(4)) and an investigation should be conducted "for as long as the fate of the victim of enforced disappearance remains unclarified" (Article 13(6)).

All those released from "disappearance" have the right to compensation under Article 19 which states that

"The victim of acts of enforced disappearance and their family shall obtain redress and shall have the right to adequate compensation."

Certain Moroccan authorities and law enforcement bodies in Morocco have consistently acted above and outside the law. The Moroccan Government has allowed impunity to those who have violated international standards and Moroccan law by arbitrarily arresting people and detaining them incommunicado for years. People have lost their lives and families have lost their relatives without any inquiry or accountability for what has happened. Individuals who have seen their right to freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention disregarded and who have lived for years in harsh, inhuman conditions have received no compensation, no inquiry into their detention and often no medical treatment.

Amnesty International is now appealing to the Moroccan Government to conduct a full investigation into how people have come to "disappear", to release all those held illegally and to ensure the rule of law.

## **ROUTES TO "DISAPPEARANCE"**

There are a great number of routes to "disappearance". Some "disappearance" is temporary or of a fixed duration, and the "disappeared" person is released after a few days, months or years. Sometimes "disappearance" appears to be intended to last indefinitely.

### **1) Dropping out of normality**

One route to "disappearance" is through dropping out of the normal legal process:

#### **a) Temporary "disappearance" in garde à vue detention before trial**

Temporary "disappearance" can be seen as an extension of the legal procedure of keeping a suspect who is being interrogated a certain number of days in *garde à vue* (incommunicado) detention without contact with lawyers, doctors and family. Even if *garde à vue* is limited to the legal eight or six-day limit a suspect may "disappear" during this period for police rarely inform the families after they have carried out an arrest. In the 1970s *garde à vue* was sometimes illegally prolonged for over two years, during which time the detainees had no contact with their families, who were never informed of where they were held. Illegal prolongations of *garde à vue* remained frequent throughout the 1980s. Some of these people were reported as "disappeared" during their period of *garde à vue* detention. For instance, the group of 178 *Frontistes*<sup>1</sup> tried in 1977 were nearly all arrested between 1974 and 1976 and held for up to two and a half years - "disappeared" in fact - in *garde à vue* detention in Derb Moulay Cherif. Thirty-four people from a radical Islamic group, mostly students, were arrested in Mohammédiya between June and September 1983

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition of leftist groups who opposed the Moroccan Government during the 1970s.

for hanging up banners and posters or painting slogans. No information was heard about their whereabouts until they were brought before the *juge d'instruction* in February 1984 with 15 other Islamists arrested in January 1984.

The decrease in reported "disappearances" since 1987 may be related to increasing respect for the legal limits of *garde à vue* detention over the same period. Amnesty International has always maintained that the misuse of *garde à vue* detention in Morocco has facilitated "disappearances". The organization welcomes the reduction of the legal maximum period of *garde à vue* detention in cases involving state security from 12 to eight days in *Dahir* (law) 1.91.110 of 30 December 1991, and believes that further reductions are necessary. It has called on the Moroccan Government to implement these as soon as possible.

**b) Temporary "disappearance" in *garde à vue* detention without trial**

Some detainees (often students suspected of sympathies with illegal opposition groups) have "disappeared" from *garde à vue* detention without ever being brought to trial. Their arrest was initially acknowledged, but later their families could get no news about them. They remained "disappeared" sometimes for years on end, before being released. One place where detainees were held incommunicado for long periods was the detention, interrogation and torture centre of Derb Moulay Cherif in Casablanca. This centre is shared by the *police judiciaire* (judiciary police) and the *Direction de la surveillance du territoire* (DST), Office of Territorial Surveillance - a branch of the security services which has frequently been involved in "disappearances".

Five students seized in 1976 during the mass arrests of *Frontistes* in 1974-1976 were not brought to trial but "disappeared" for over eight years in secret detention centres until they were released in December 1984. The testimony of one is given at the end of this paper. Twelve university and secondary school students arrested in January and February 1983 dropped out of normal legal procedure and "disappeared" a few months later. Initially they were held in the Casablanca Central Police Station. Their lawyers and relatives were not allowed access but some families were apparently allowed to bring food to the police station for them once a week. This was abruptly stopped on 5 May 1983 when they were moved elsewhere. Their families raised their cases with the *procureur général* (public prosecutor) and with the Minister of Justice and publicized their cases in the local media. An international protest campaign was mounted and eventually, in 1984 and 1985, most of the students were released. One of the group, however, Abderrazak Nouhaili, remained in secret detention and was not released until 1986, for reasons which were not clear.

**c) "Disappearance" after trial and acquittal**

Some detainees who have been tried and acquitted, have subsequently "disappeared", sometimes without ever being freed and returned to their families. Mohamed Sajid, a member of the *Union nationale des forces populaires* (UNFP), National Union of Popular

Forces, an opposition party of the left, was acquitted of plotting against the King in two trials of members of the UNFP held in 1963 and 1964. Soon afterwards he was arrested and "disappeared". Belkacem and Hammou Ouezzane were taken from Kenitra Central Prison to a secret destination immediately after their acquittal at a military court in August 1973. Their families waited for them in vain outside the prison and Belkacem Ouezzane has never been seen since. Hammou Ouezzane was discovered in 1979 doing forced labour on a remote farm and released after pressure from his family. He said that until 1974 he had been held in a secret jail with his cousin Belkacem.

**d) "Disappearance" after imprisonment**

"Disappearance" has also hit those who had been tried and sentenced in accordance with normal legal procedure. Such groups have not actually "disappeared" in the usual sense as the government does not deny holding them; however, their fate is yet another example of the many possible routes to secret detention and the variety of forms "disappearance" in Morocco can take. In August 1973, 58 members of the armed forces who had been involved in attempted *coups d'état* against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972 - all sentenced to three years or more - were secretly moved from Kenitra Central Prison to Tazmamert. From then on the authorities withheld all information about their fate, never even acknowledging the existence of Tazmamert. In these remote barracks, where a slow death in darkness and isolation seems to have been part of the punishment, 31 of the original 58 had died by the time the rest were set free in 1991. On rare occasions, the inmates of one block were able to smuggle letters out during their 18 years' detention. Thus some of their families knew what had become of them and their fate had been raised for years without success by human rights bodies outside Morocco.

**2) Arrest for "disappearance"**

Many of the "disappeared" realized from the outset that a special procedure was being followed: they were kidnapped by armed men with no semblance of legality, taken straight to a secret centre, saw no member of any normal police force and never had the impression that they were being interrogated for any *procès verbal* (police statement). Ali Bourequat, a businessman closely connected to the palace, was arrested at home at 4am on 8 July 1973 by members of the DST in plainclothes. They surrounded the house and took him at once to a secret villa in Rabat; a few hours later they returned for his brothers Bayazid and Midhat. As they testify: "We were convinced from the first day that this was the end. For we weren't arrested in a normal way, nor brought into a normal place..."

For Sahrawis, "disappearance", for a few weeks or months or indefinitely, seems to have been used as the "normal" punishment. Only very seldom was any Western Saharan suspected of opposing Moroccan rule or supporting Polisario ever brought to court<sup>2</sup>.

## AGENTS OF "DISAPPEARANCE"

A number of the Moroccan security services reportedly include parallel secret services which carry out unacknowledged operations with direct responsibility to the King and the Minister of the Interior. It is they who have been most involved in "disappearances". Although some of the "disappeared" have been arrested normally and then taken over by branches of the parallel services, many of them, like the Bourequat brothers, have from the beginning been in the hands of one of the secret services.

The main branches of the Moroccan security service are the police, the *gendarmerie* and the armed forces. They are supplemented by a number of different, and often rival, intelligence services - specialist elite brigades with political or guard duties, and auxiliary forces. The forces whose parallel services have been most involved in "disappearance" appear to have been the specialist police force known as the *Direction de la surveillance du territoire* (DST), Office of Territorial Surveillance, and the *gendarmerie*; however, detainees arrested by other services, such as the *police judiciaire*, (the normal criminal police force), or the *Forces armées royales* (FAR), Royal Armed Forces (in the case of Sahrawis captured while attempting to rejoin the Polisario Front camps in Tindouf, Algeria), have been handed over to the DST or parallel services for interrogation and later "disappearance". The "disappeared" in secret centres in towns may be guarded by the DST, the *gendarmerie* or their parallel services; those held in the provinces seem to be guarded by local auxiliary forces known as *makhazini*.

The police force directly responsible for conducting investigations and operations leading to the identification and arrest of individuals involved in a wide range of crimes (including those against the security of the State), is the *police judiciaire* (PJ) which includes plainclothes officers. The PJ is also in charge of interrogating suspects under the theoretical control of the *procureur du Roi* (Public Prosecutor). The PJ is a branch of the *sûreté nationale*, National Security, whose other branches are the *corps urbain*, Urban

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<sup>2</sup> The only group known to Amnesty International of Sahrawi political detainees which did appear before the courts up to 1991 was the so-called "Meknes Group" - 25 men and one woman - who were arrested between April and December 1977 and reported to have "disappeared". After being held for six months in secret centres they were brought before the *juge d'instruction* and transferred to Meknes Civil Prison. They were brought to trial in 1980 accused of crimes against internal and external state security, sentenced to four or five years imprisonment and released in 1981 and 1982.

Corps, used for normal policing duties, the *Compagnies mobiles pour intervention* (CMI), Mobile Intervention Companies - a motorized riot police force - and an internal security service known as the Sub-directorate for Internal Security. Although those arrested by the PJ are normally dealt with in accordance with proper legal procedure, some of the former "disappeared" said that, following initial arrest by the PJ or the CMI, they were held in secret detention by a branch of the CMI or handed over to the DST.

The *gendarmerie royale*, Royal Gendarmerie, is a paramilitary police force, technically controlled by the Royal Moroccan Army, but in practice personally supervised by the King. Although the *gendarmerie* was set up as a special security service for rural areas, investigations are often indistinguishable from those of the other security services. Its size and equipment were greatly expanded immediately after the 1971 and 1972 army coup attempts. Many testimonies reveal the *gendarmerie*'s involvement in "disappearances", and a number of former "disappeared", such as the brothers Bourequat, have stated that they and others were held for years without charge or trial in the *gendarmerie royale* centre in Rabat. Sahrawis arrested by the Moroccan armed forces while trying to cross over to Algeria were handed over to the *gendarmerie* and kept in secret detention in various places before being transferred, up until 1990, to Qal'at M'gouna.

The DST, an autonomous service set up in 1973, appears to be the intelligence force most involved in "disappearances". Its head is appointed by the King and it is based at the Ministry of the Interior in Rabat. DST officials, who do not wear uniforms, compile information on political activists and senior government officials and conduct interrogations. Although they are not supposed to make arrests, in fact in the case of political suspects they frequently do and themselves hold such suspects prisoner. The *Direction générale des études et documentation* (DGED), General Office of Research and Documentation, also gathers information on national security; it is the most secretive of the various intelligence-gathering bodies and reports directly to the King.

Often in competition with the DST, the *Renseignements généraux* (RG), General Intelligence, - a specialist police force - mainly works on information gathering. It is involved exclusively in political affairs. Like the PJ, the RG is based in police stations all over the country. It conducts interrogations and is occasionally involved in arresting suspects. It does not seem to have been directly involved in "disappearances" and is said to pride itself in interrogating without the use of torture.

The force most frequently used to guard the "disappeared" in forts or camps in rural areas are the *makhazini*, auxiliary forces (the "*makhzan*" means the administration in Morocco). The *Makhazini administrative* (administrative auxiliary forces) are based in provinces or municipalities and under the command of the provincial or prefectural governors. *Makhazini* are given some military training but know little about law. Formerly often illiterate they now tend to have completed primary education. Testimonies of released

"disappeared" who had been held in various outlying provinces describe visits by provincial governors to detention centres guarded by *makhazini*, and there seems little doubt that, although probably not involved in ordering "disappearances", provincial governors are part of the system which has not only condoned, but also directly organized, the imprisonment of scores of people for decades in secret unacknowledged detention.

The various security services act in ignorance of and often in competition with each other. The element of competition increased and became deeply entrenched after the 1971 and 1972 attempted coups which had been led by the closest servant of King Hassan II, General Oufkir (a former Minister of the Interior who had himself reportedly organized "disappearances", extra-judicial executions and torture in secret). After 1971 the King tried to reward those loyal to him. The army was no longer to be trusted and King Hassan took over the post of Minister of Defence. Houcine Ben Slimane, Governor of Tangier, who made a broadcast over Tangier radio in support of King Hassan during the 1971 attempted coup, was promoted to the rank of Colonel and put in charge of the *gendarmerie royale*, which became the most modern service in Morocco. Until his death, he is said to have coordinated and directed the parallel services. Other services were run by Major Ahmed Dlimi, who himself died in mysterious circumstances in 1983, reportedly after his own attempted *coup d'état* was discovered.

## SECRET DETENTION CENTRES

"These prisons are not on any list held in the prison administration division of the Ministry of the Interior".

[Reply of the Moroccan delegation to the United Nations Human Rights Committee's question on the whereabouts of Tazmamert and Qal'at M'gouna, November 1991]

Non-appearance on official lists is one thing all secret detention centres have in common. Just as there are many routes to "disappearance", so there are many different centres for holding the "disappeared". "Disappearance" victims have been held in a variety of secret centres, isolated farms, and villas. They may be kept in secret parts of registered prisons or old forts (*qsour*, singular *qsar*). Sometimes their places of detention, like Tazmamert, are in remote areas barred to the public. Or a detention building may be in a town centre or a smart residential suburb. Some of the forts which have contained detainees have been on tourist routes.

The treatment also varies. Some "disappeared" have been treated quite well in secret centres. The Bourequat, in Poste Fixe III (a villa in Rabat) between 1973 and 1975, were given chicken and meat or fish and allowed to send out to the *pâtisserie* for extras. By 1975

they could take exercise in the yard for up to three hours a day. In Tazmamert, after 1981, they received barely enough to keep them alive, and in 10 years were allowed only once to leave the darkness of their isolation cells. The Oufkir family were kept isolated in individual windowless cells in a former French farm in Bir Jdid, south of Casablanca, from 1977 to 1987. No one knew where they were and they could get no access to medical treatment. After four members of the family escaped and contacted the outside world before being recaptured in 1987, they were moved to a more comfortable farm in Targa, about eight miles west of Marrakesh, where they had a television, access to a government doctor, occasional visits from the parents of Mrs Oufkir and their lawyer, and the youngest boy, Abdellatif, was allowed to play football.

Political prisoners who have been held initially in normal police stations have sometimes dropped out of the system and "disappeared". This has happened at Derb Moulay Cherif, a secret detention and torture centre in Casablanca where political prisoners have frequently been held and tortured. In the 1970s and early 1980s political detainees, later brought to trial, or, like Abdelmoumni Fouad, released in 1983 without charge or trial after 18 months' secret detention, were held here for up to three years. Throughout that time they were kept blindfold and prone, their hands handcuffed behind their backs. Detainees were treated the same way in other centres, such as the "Complex", the DST headquarters in Rabat. Both these centres have been places where some detainees have slipped into "disappearance" and others have later been brought to trial or released. Centres in other towns have performed the same dual function, but a number of centres have been used exclusively as prisons for the "disappeared". At least 11 villas in Rabat are said to be used to hold those who "disappear". One such place was Dar Mokri, a detention and torture centre much used in the 1960s. The Bourequat brothers were first detained in a villa known as "Poste Fixe I" and later moved to "Poste Fixe III" where they were held with Houcine El Manouzi, a trade unionist kidnapped in 1972. After their escape and recapture in 1975, the brothers were taken to the headquarters of the *gendarmarie* and later to the *gendarmarie* barracks on the Casablanca road out of Rabat, where they stayed for six years. In most towns there seem to be buildings used by the DST or one of the parallel services to hold the "disappeared". Released "disappeared" have described detention centres in buildings in Fez, Laayoune and Skoura. A number of "disappeared" were held for years in the CMI headquarters, near the centre of Laayoune and the building may still hold people detained illegally arrested since its inmates were released in 1991. "Disappeared" are still thought to be held in buildings in Smara, Goulimine and other towns.

The "disappeared" have been held in secret barracks, forts or prisons in rural areas, such as Tazmamert, Agdz and Qal'at M'gouna.

The Tazmamert secret prison was built especially for those officers - 58 in number - who had been sentenced to between three years' and life imprisonment for participating in attempted coups against King Hassan II in 1971 and 1972. They were transferred there in

1973. The jail was next to an army barracks, but the whole area - on a side road off the Rich to Er-Rachidia main road - was out of bounds to all outsiders. One wife attempted to visit the centre and was turned back. The jail consisted of 29 two-metres by three-metres cells on each side of a courtyard which served as a cemetery. The aim of the prison was, apparently, the slow death of its inmates. The outside world was alerted to Tazmamert after inmates of one of the two buildings managed to smuggle out letters. The prisoners were moved elsewhere in 1991 - more than 18 years after their secret detention began. The 27 still left alive were released. According to the Moroccan authorities the building was destroyed.

Agdz is an ancient fort in a small town of the same name beside the Wadi [valley] Dra' in southern Morocco. A former detainee has described it as "an enormous old fort, built of baked bricks, clay and stones. The walls were 80cm thick. A great wall surrounds it isolating it completely from the outside world." Prisoners said they could hear the noises of town celebrations and a market on Wednesdays. Sahrawi "disappeared" were held there from 1976, joined by 10 Moroccans in 1977 and later by a Lebanese. They remained there until 1983 when it was no longer considered safe following an escape attempt and the prisoners were transferred elsewhere.

Qal'at M'gouna is in the picturesque rose-producing valley of the Wadi Dades, a favourite haunt of tourists. The detention centre was built inside the town's fort as a secure place in which to house those Sahrawi and Moroccan "disappeared" who were transferred from Agdz in 1983. New wings were constantly added to house more "disappeared" until 1991 when all the surviving Sahrawi prisoners were released. It is not known whether a Lebanese and a Libyan, who were not released, are still detained.

Hundreds of Sahrawi "disappeared" continue to be held. Many are said to be in the remote forts in the mountain triangle between Er-Rachidia, Ouarzazate and Agadir. Former "disappeared" have described buildings where they were kept in Goulmima and Boumalen of Dades, on the road from Er-Rachidia to Qal'at M'gouna and in Skoura beyond Qal'at M'gouna on the road to Ouarzazate. Four forts which have been named are Qal'at al-Qaid Abdellah (Ouarzazate region); Qsar Ait Chair (Skoura region) and Oued el-Male (Skoura region). Another centre is said to be in Oued Ounil (Ouarzazate Region), which is said to be so remote that access to it is usually by helicopter. Other secret detention centres are said to exist in the Atlas mountains between Ouarzazate and Agadir.

## MOROCCAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

"There have been excesses, but I must say this was out of negligence or forgetfulness rather than out of a desire to do harm". [King Hassan II,

3 September 1992, on the French television channel Antenne 2]

Amnesty International has campaigned on "disappearances" in Morocco since the early 1970s. Between 1975 and 1981, 89 individuals who had "disappeared" were adopted by the organization. Over the next 12 years Amnesty International groups wrote thousands of letters, telegrams and postcards on behalf of these prisoners, but with minimal response. Amnesty International delegations which visited Morocco in 1981 and 1988 raised the question of the "disappeared" with the government, and, in 1991, with King Hassan II. But delegates and groups have been met by a wall of silence and denial.

In 1990 and 1991 Amnesty International made its concerns public in two reports on Morocco: *Morocco: "Disappearances" of People of Western Saharan Origin* (AI Index: MDE 29/17/90) and *Morocco: A Pattern of Political Imprisonment, "Disappearances" and Torture* (AI Index: MDE 29/01/91). In the following year, more than 40 long-term political prisoners, prisoners of conscience or possible prisoners of conscience, were released, major legal reforms were introduced and nearly 300 long-term "disappeared" prisoners re-emerged and were set free. The Oufkir family were released in February 1991 from the villa near Marrakech where they had been held. More than 260 Sahrawis were freed from Qal'at M'gouna and Laayoune in June 1991; some of those in Qal'at M'gouna had "disappeared" since November 1975. The 27 surviving military detainees who had been in Tazmamert since August 1973 were removed from the prison in September and, after medical treatment, mostly released in September and October 1991. Two, who were transferred to Kenitra Central Prison to continue serving sentences reduced to 30 years' imprisonment from life, were set free in 1992. The three Bourequat brothers were released together in December 1991.

For 20 years the Moroccan Government denied holding people it later released from secret detention. Many of those who were freed had been adopted by Amnesty International groups whose members had written, not just hundreds, but thousands of communications to the Moroccan authorities on their behalf. For instance, the case of El Bechir (Abdi)ould Labbatould Mayara, born in 1937, had been worked on by two Netherlands groups. They wrote to King Hassan, the Minister of Saharan Affairs, other ministers, prison and hospital directors, and human rights organizations, local authorities, headmasters, mayors and the Moroccan Ambassador. Among the few replies they received were two identical ones from the Ministry of Justice stating that "the person cannot be found on any prisoner lists...searches made by the Ministry have yielded no result". They had written to 22 prisons; a few replied that he was not on their lists. Abdi Mayara was one of the 267 Sahrawis released in June 1991, more than 15 years after his "disappearance" on 3 February 1976. The first time his detention was acknowledged by the Moroccan Government was after his release. His name, denied so often by so many government authorities, appears with 266 others on a "List of the persons originating from the Sahara reprieved by His

Majesty King Hassan II following the request of the members of the Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs".

Many of the cases of those later released, as well as of those still "disappeared", were raised by families or non-governmental organizations including Amnesty International, with the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID). This sub-committee of experts appointed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, raises cases directly with governments, and reports on the replies. The 1983 report of the Working Group states that:

"In a letter dated 20 June 1983, the Government of Morocco informed the Working Group of the results of its investigations. With regard to the reported disappearance of three brothers who were said to have been arrested on the same day at their home, the Government stated that the records of the courts, the Ministry of Justice and the prisons had been searched, but that no record of criminal charges or of any other judicial procedures regarding the brothers had been found. In the Government's view, they should be sought outside the country". (UN E/CN.4/1984/21 para.135).

Amnesty International is now calling on the Moroccan Government to cooperate with the WGEID in trying to trace the rest of the "disappeared".

## **BREAKING THE WALL OF SILENCE**

Although over the past 15 years Moroccan human rights organizations and certain newspapers have raised many "disappearance" cases, those of certain "disappeared" were for a long time a taboo topic within Morocco. They were believed to have been eliminated because they had threatened or been suspected of threatening the personal safety of the King or the territorial integrity of the country through their alleged support for the Polisario Front. Perhaps because of fear of arrest or persecution, these "disappearances", as if by tacit agreement, were not discussed openly within the country by local human rights groups, parliament or the press.

The breaking of this wall of silence for some cases came at the end of 1990 and may have played a part in the 1991 releases. From December 1990 the secret prison of Tazmamert, where 58 military men had been held in isolated detention in atrocious and life-threatening conditions, was discussed publicly in Morocco, first by a member of parliament, then by certain newspapers and human rights groups. Petitions from the families of the detainees were printed in newspapers and other "disappearances" were publicly referred to.

The practice of "disappearance" has increasingly been raised in communiques and reports issued by Moroccan human rights groups and reported in the Moroccan press. The coordinating committee of the *Association marocaine des droits de l'homme* and the *Ligue marocaine pour la défense des droits de l'homme*, and the *Organisation marocaine des droits de l'homme* have concentrated recent campaigns on "disappearances" in Morocco, calling for an explanation about a number of cases.

However, consistent with the continuing repression of publicly voiced dissent over the future of the Western Sahara, outspoken though some newspapers and human rights groups have been about other violations, they have remained silent on the continuing "disappearance" of people of Western Saharan origin and the restrictions on the liberty of those "disappeared", Moroccans and Sahrawis, who have been released.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although those who have "disappeared" in Morocco form only a minute proportion of all arrests made by branches of the security services, temporary or permanent "disappearance" in unacknowledged detention has affected hundreds of Western Saharans and scores of Moroccans over the past 30 years. Hundreds are still in secret detention, while those set free are watched, restricted in their movements and contacts with others, and denied their entitlement to compensation for their years of suffering. Families continue to suffer anguish and loss without news of their relatives.

In 1991 Morocco took the important step of releasing 300 people who had "disappeared" and been held for up to 18 years in incommunicado detention without charge or trial. But since 1992 no further releases are known to have taken place and no inquiry has ever been made to explain how people have remained imprisoned in harsh conditions for so long without charge or trial.

In 1993 Amnesty International is yet again urging the Moroccan Government to close, once and for all, this chapter in Morocco's history.

Amnesty International urges the Moroccan Government as an immediate first step to make a statement at the highest level that "disappearance" is unacceptable and that incommunicado detention without charge or trial will never again be allowed in Morocco. All those "disappeared" who are held on account of their origin or the non-violent expression of their fundamental beliefs should be released immediately and unconditionally; all others should also be released if, as their "disappearance" suggests, the Moroccan

authorities have no intention of bringing them to trial promptly and fairly on recognizably criminal charges as required by international standards.

### **Accounting for the "Disappeared"**

È In order to ensure that all remaining "disappeared" are released, the Moroccan Government should form a commission of inquiry formed of members chosen for their impartiality and competence which should be independent of any institution or agency that might be the subject of the inquiry. The commission should be empowered to visit all alleged places of secret detention and release all those illegally detained. Its terms of reference should include an obligation to account, as far as possible, for all persons who have "disappeared" after arrest at any time over the last 35 years; such accounting should include the whole history of detention and, for those who have died, the circumstances and causes of the death. The commission should have the right to question any person and to have full access to all documents necessary to their inquiries.

È Those who have participated in enforced disappearances should be brought to justice unless, in conformity with Article 4(2) of the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,

"Mitigating circumstances may be established in national legislation for persons who, having participated in enforced disappearances, are instrumental in bringing the victims forward alive or in providing voluntarily information which would contribute to clarifying cases of enforced disappearance".

### **Redress for those released**

All those released from "disappearance" have the right to freedom of communication, association and movement, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Moroccan Government should also:

- È compensate all the victims of "disappearance" for the years of anguish and suffering they have endured; to compensate fully the families of all those who have died in secret incommunicado detention;
- È ensure that all victims of "disappearance" and their families receive, free of charge, all medical and psychiatric treatment necessary to restore their health;

- È ensure that those who have been released after years of "disappearance" in secret detention have access to education if desired; that they be helped to find jobs and training; and they should not be prevented in any way from travelling outside the country.

### **Breaking the Silence**

Amnesty International urges the Moroccan authorities to dissipate the atmosphere of secrecy and silence which has helped the practice of "disappearances" to flourish by launching a full and open debate on "disappearances" within the national media and among human rights bodies.

**The above steps should be taken without delay. In order to improve safeguards against any future "disappearances" of those arrested by the security forces Amnesty International urges the Moroccan Government to implement in full the provisions of the 1992 Declaration on the protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, in particular:**

- È cooperate with relevant United Nations mechanisms in order to put an end to the phenomenon of enforced disappearance in Morocco;
- È ensure that arrests are only made by authorized officials acting in full accordance with the law;
- È ensure that all detainees have prompt access to justice;
- È see that detainees are held only in officially recognized places of detention;
- È inform relatives, lawyers and others having a legitimate interest promptly after any arrest;
- È maintain up-to-date registers of all detainees in every place of detention; additionally establish centralised registers open to lawyers and the relatives of detainees or those suspected of having "disappeared";
- È ensure that thorough, impartial investigations are conducted whenever "disappearances" are alleged by relatives or wherever there are reasonable grounds for believing that a "disappearance" has occurred;
- È bring to justice those found guilty of causing "disappearances".



## TESTIMONIES OF THE FORMER "DISAPPEARED"

### ***Testimony of the brothers Bayazid, Midhat and Ali Bourequat - arrested on 8 July 1973, released on 30 December 1991:***

[Most of this testimony comes from an interview with all three brothers; as the brothers supplemented each others' testimony, the actual speaker has usually not been specified]

Our troubles began with a denunciation to the King [His Majesty Hassan II]... we denounced a conspiracy led by the head of the Moroccan secret services, Colonel Dlimi. Ali saw the King in person to tell him this, but he didn't want to believe it. But there was no need to put us in prison. That's what we still don't understand. We still don't understand why he has kept this hate, this cruelty towards us.

We were arrested on 8 July 1973 at 4am. Midhat opened the door to the police who burst into the villa, pushing open the door. One jumped over the inner wall waving a revolver - it was the Wild West! One who jumped over the wall on the left was a friend [of Bayazid]. He turned away and left, he couldn't look me in the face. I said: "Is it a search?" They said: "No, it isn't a search". I said: "Why have you come in this manner?" He replied, in a friendly way: "Show us round the house". I took them round the house. I came to Ali's room. He was asleep, as were his wife and daughter, and I wanted to hide him... so he would have the time to escape so I called him by my other brother's name, I called out "Omar, Omar!" He woke up with a start from a deep sleep and said "No, I'm Ali!" I wanted him to have time to hide to get to an embassy, but he couldn't have even imagined that they'd come to get him. Ali was arrested first, Midhat and Bayazid some hours later, at 10am. They said that they'd take us to the King for questioning... they stopped the car, put blindfolds on us and covered us with a blanket.

Ali was interrogated and tortured; Bayazid and Midhat were also interrogated for five days at P.F.I. This was a torture centre and we heard people shouting and crying. Then we were transferred to Poste Fixe III (P.F.III). We stayed there a year without ever going out, then another commandant came who would let us go out, at first for just half an hour at a time, later up to three times a day for about three hours.

In 1975, we escaped. There were four military men from the Skhirat case with us, four who had been sentenced in the Skhirat trial and one civilian [Houcine El Manouzi] sentenced in absentia at the Marrakesh trial who had been kidnapped... Lieutenant Colonel Ababou, Captain Chellat, Officer Cadet Mrizek and Adjutant chief Akka. When we got out, he and Akka left together, Chellat left alone and we left with Ababou and Mrizek, who

supported my brother as he couldn't walk. Ababou led the group. We didn't see the others again. During the morning we were recaptured; that is, we three, Ababou and Mzirek; when they took us back to the prison, Chellat was there. He had been recaptured early in the morning because he had gone straight to town. We three stayed there for some time, then we were taken to the gendarmerie. We were no longer in the hands of the para-police. Ababou, Mzirek and Chellat were liquidated three days later opposite us in the yard. They were buried in the yard of Birami Prison in Rabat. We didn't see them, but there was gunfire, then in the evening we heard the sound of a spade and pickaxe. The next day the only cells open were ours and those of our mother and sister.

After our rearrest we were first taken back to P.F.III for several days; then to the Rabat *Brigade de la gendarmerie* centre for 15 days; then to the *gendarmerie* barracks on the Casablanca road out of Rabat. All three of us were in the same room, and our mother and sister, who had been arrested when we escaped, were in the next room. Then we were taken to a police centre in Casablanca where we stayed until 2 September 1976 and then to the *gendarmerie* headquarters until 26 March 1981, when we were taken to Tazmamert. In the *gendarmerie* headquarters there was a basement where they kept detainees... there were Sahrawis, military men, who would be interrogated and then removed.

In Tazmamert we used to call out to the other prisoners from one cell to another. We shouted - when we could. When we got very weak, we'd call once every three days or once a week. We were isolated; we didn't see each other again till the day of our release, 10 years later. The cells were 3m by 2m. The wall was at least 30cm thick... like a bank vault. The cells were made of cement - they'd left it like that; you could feel all the bumps. There was a cement bed two metres square at the end of the cell. At the entrance was a hole for the toilet and 14 holes, about 10cm in diameter, in the wall looking out on to the corridor. There was no light, no water... nothing. They gave us a pitcher of water, containing about 3,4,5, litres, in the morning, and for food a pot of tea, a sort of cat's piss, and 300-350 gm of bread; at midday half a pan of lentils, chickpeas or beans boiled in water and in the evening a pan of vermicelli.

We had no medicine, no medical orderly. The warders were ordered not to talk to us. In Building 1 they were able to get medicine, they had money. That's how they were able to keep going... while in Building 2, 26 out of 33 men died. When we arrived there had been 19 deaths and while we were there there were seven. The warders were different. The regime was much harsher in Building 2 than in Building 1. One jailor was forever watching another; they were all afraid of each other. When we asked them for help or anything they would say: "We're not allowed to talk to you".

We wrote to the King. Bayazid did so first. They took him out into the yard, gave him paper and he wrote to the King. Ali wrote over a year later. This was in 1984 and 1986.

We held on until it would be our turn to die. We were convinced from the first moment of our arrest that all was over. We weren't arrested in a normal way, or brought to a normal place, or anything.

We kept sane by not thinking about our situation, or about the food. We didn't think about the present, and we escaped by thinking. We were in Paris all the time. We planned menus, we invented culinary specialities; we talked about Paris, we evolved architectural plans, we rebuilt towns... and that passed the time. What is the capital of such and such a country? We ran through African countries and Asian countries.. from one continent to another. But we never tired of the subject of Paris. From 1973 till our release we never stopped talking about Paris. And we got the other prisoners on to the same wavelength. We told them routes through Paris which they learnt by heart. Then we'd call someone and say: "How d'you go to get to such and such a road?" We'd tell them about particular places... tell them that such and such a *Chocolaterie* was at such and such a place...

We never lost track of the days. We kept count. From the first day of our imprisonment until our release we were in prison for 6,750 days.

Bayazid and Midhat were completely paralysed. Midhat stayed sitting for seven years on end and slept sitting. We got weaker. First we could only move with difficulty, then we couldn't get up at all. One day Bayazid stayed lying down till the guards came and he asked them for help. It was exceptional for them to do this as generally they weren't allowed to go into the cells. Ali did not lie down from March 1986 onwards, but was able to stand up... If you were sitting you could get up from the bed, but lying down... that was the end. The people who couldn't get up lay on the ground with their blanket. That way they weren't far from the door and could push their food bowls by stretching their arms out. But when they couldn't move their arms any more, that was the end. If someone couldn't push his bowl forward, the jailor would speak to him to see if he was still alive. If he didn't reply they'd come and feel him to see if he was dead, and if so, they'd bury him in the yard. They'd know he was dying but they wouldn't even give him a glass of water.

Then on 28 June 1991, the head of the building... told the four military men to collect their things as they were being transferred to Building 1, but we were to stay in Building 2. They opened up the cells for some days to air them and a whole team of soldiers turned up to clean them with a load of detergents. They put us just in front of the main door in cells which were a bit lighter. We were afraid the others would leave and we'd stay there for ever. But from about 1 September the warders began saying: "Good morning". Then on the morning of 15 September, they told us we would get new clothes and that we should take off the rags we were wearing. In the evening they came to get us and we were taken to a military holiday camp...

They released one group of military men on 15 October, another on 22 October and a third on 29 October, but they told Ali: "You'll stay here till your brothers are in a state fit to be seen". Bayazid and Midhat were in hospital and then transferred in December to the police station in Casablanca, where they brought Ali the next day, Sunday 29 December [they had not seen each other since 1981]. It was as though we had been separated only the night before... They brought all three of us before the military prosecutor general at Rabat. They told us that the Prime Minister did not have a sufficient charge to bring against us and that we were free. It was 30 December... So, "Au revoir, Messieurs". But we said: "Where shall we go? We don't know if we've still got a family, we've no money or papers"... So they contacted our old address and phoned our brother-in-law...

***Testimony of Mohamed Nadrani***  
***- arrested in April 1976, released on 31 December 1984:***

I was taken from home on 12 April 1976, when I was 22 and in the first year of my philosophy course at the Université Mohammed V. They took me to the *Centre Général du DST* at Rabat, which is well-known as a secret detention centre... the "Complex". I found other detainees there: Abdenasser Banou Hachem, Mohamed Errhoui (nicknamed Sahraoui), Abderrahman Kounsi, Moulay Driss Lahrizi, Lahbib Belloukh, someone from Oujda whose name I never knew (we called him al-Oujdi) and three *makhazini* who had guarded the Oufkir family and made the mistake of helping them correspond with Oufkir's father-in-law, Mr Chennah.

We remained for 16 months at the Complex, from 12 April 1976 to 5 August 1977, and suffered all sorts of tortures: the parrot, the aeroplane, electric shocks. We were kept blindfold throughout, and handcuffed. We slept on camp beds and food was sent round from the Hôpital Avicenna, which was next-door to the detention centre. I can't complain of the food, which was sufficient and good. The cell door was open night and day and opened on to a corridor where a warder sat. His presence oppressed us, day and night. Whenever we heard a newcomer arrive we expected him to call out our names and that we'd be tortured again - it was a constant nightmare.

We lived in the hope of appearing before an investigating judge and of having a public and fair trial.

The night of 5 August 1977 was disturbing. There was too much movement in the corridor. I thought it might mean we were to be released, as the warders had told us this would happen. I was sceptical, but I thought at least we'd hear what the judgment against us was. I began to think of my family, the questions I'd answer. I burnt with desire, love and longing.

They had swapped our handcuffs for others and put bigger blindfolds on us, covering the whole face. It was difficult to breathe. I left an old torn pullover behind but a guard said: "Take it, you'll need it!" Those words fell like a block of ice - so there was no question of freeing us...

We were driven off in a CMI van, too small for us 10 and the four guards who went with us. We didn't know where we were going. We felt the lights of the town. We turned left, in the direction of Casa[blanca]. Then I thought we'd either turn left towards Derb Moulay Cherif, another secret detention centre, or right to Ghbila Prison in Casablanca. But alas, we didn't take either route. I felt we were going towards my home town, Khouribga, but we turned right, just after Berrechid, so we were heading towards Marrakech. There we stopped briefly. We could hear someone singing "Hamid Ezzaher". It seemed that we'd stopped in a public square. Then our convoy continued south. The heat was stifling; the metal burnt our flesh and the two military blankets covering each of us were suffocating. We couldn't bear this heat coming from the sun, the metal, the blankets and our clothes... we were wearing everything we had. We were piled on top of each other and everyone vomited. This infernal convoy continued towards Ouarzazate and the sun began to set. Later I realised that the stop had been for administrative reasons as from then on we were to be under the responsibility of Ouarzazate and its governor.

We finally stopped at Agdz, a remote little Berber village. Every year there was a fête there for the marabout and this year it coincided with our arrival. We could hear drums and songs.

Surrounded by uniformed police, we were taken one after the other into a fort (*qsar*). We were put in a sort of passage opening on to a large yard surrounded by cells. There was a big door at one end with a massive iron lock on it, a metre long, which passed through big rings fixed to the door. In front of the door there was a guard holding a big stick with both hands. It was clear that we were now to face a different prison system. We were no longer under the police: they had handed us over to the auxiliary forces' mobile companies.

The policemen removed our handcuffs. We thought they must belong to the police and we would have other handcuffs put on, but to our amazement an auxiliary chief said: "Take off what you're wearing on your heads!" He meant the blindfolds. We hesitated, unable to believe our ears. Then we pulled them off, and looked at the guards and at each other for the first time. But before we could start rejoicing the guards had leapt on us with their sticks like hungry wolves. They beat us ferociously for no apparent reason, hurling shouts and blows at us indiscriminately. We dodged some blows but sustained many. We were bleeding all over.

They threw us into a dark cell, aching all over and thirsty... a horrible cell, dark! stinking! sordid! Then the guards burst in again and the chief entered, wearing a uniform

with black epaulettes. He spoke with a Berber accent from Er-Rashidia: "They've brought you here to die. Too bad for those who die - there'll be no inquiry. You're here to keep your heads bowed".

We wanted the night to last forever. We were afraid of the daylight and what we might see. It was like watching a monster wake. It was all closed in... a great wall with barbed wire on top and four sentries standing at the four corners with Second World War Soviet machine-guns, and with cells below around a quiet, calm courtyard. Birds were the first to invade it... birds from the south, speckled red and white and yellow... It was a long time since I had seen a bird and I was enchanted by their presence. The creaking of a lock brought me back to myself. We listened in total silence. Another lock creaked, a door closed, another creaking lock. We weren't the only prisoners - there were others. We heard women's voices - we couldn't make out what they were saying, but they had a southern accent. We got close to the door to look through the cracks. There weren't many of them, draped in the black *chadors* of the south. They were hurriedly washing their faces and hands from pitchers in the yard. Then there was another creaking lock, shouts and insults hurled at the women, and they ran back into their cells.

There was more interminable creaking and we couldn't believe our eyes. About 100 men came into the yard... young and old, in rags, draped with blankets, coming and going. The old ones formed a circle and walked slowly round. Then more creaking and these shadows of people all disappeared to the deafening shouts of the guards. We could hear the last ones in being beaten.

We didn't understand who these men and women shut up in prison were. If they were common law prisoners, why were we there? Might we still be brought to trial?

At recreation time, we saw the older ones especially walking slowly round the yard in a circle close to our cell. We saw them looking at its closed door. Then one day we heard a surreptitious call as they passed our cell: "Have patience and faith!" (*al-sabr wa'l-iman*). These words of such a strong religious and political significance made us feel that they could not be common law prisoners. But we couldn't resolve the enigma. Watched closely by the guards, they couldn't talk to us. Most wore *gandouras*, and these rags rubbing together made a strange sound. They wore plastic sandals tied on with bits of wire. Some were barefoot. Their *gandouras* were obviously patched. To judge by their appearance they'd spent a long time in detention. Most of them were skinny; the old bent by age and suffering. Most had sunken eyes and long thin beards covering faces ravaged by sickness and hunger. Then the guards appeared and the prisoners ran back to their cells. Calm reigned.

Then the sinister silhouette of the brigadier came to our door. "Give them a piece of soap and they can go and wash their clothes". We were glad to feel the sun's rays on our

bodies after such a long time. We'd almost forgotten it existed. It was so bright that our eyes couldn't bear to look at it but we could feel it on our backs. It was also a link with the world outside - the same sun was shining all over the world. At the same time we were astonished to see that our bodies were covered with little red spots, like measles.

Time passed more and more slowly. Minutes turned into hours, hours into days and days into months. Our straining ears were our only means of communication, our only senses. We tried to catch the sound of every voice that might be made to mean something.

At mealtimes we'd hear the clatter of metal plates and the usual order: "Run! Run!" A guard would put 10 plates 20 metres from our door. Two people carrying a big cauldron would put two spoons of liquid into each plate. Then we'd have to run and fetch them, the plates burning our hands. With the guards raining blows on us throughout, we'd try to save what we could and not drop the plates. Was any meal worth all this... a bowl of warm water with some lentils floating in it - counting them wouldn't be too difficult. The lentils did not appear to have been cooked, with a just a few spots of oil floating on top of the water. We could see grains of sand in it, but the worst thing was the rust. We were sure of only one thing: that we would leave our skins behind here. It couldn't go on like this. Death was omnipresent for us, asleep and awake. It was already lying in wait for us and we were on our way to it. We had the feeling that if we 10 stayed united we could resist it, but if one of us became isolated he would succumb.

We spent two weeks in our first cell, the darkest of the lot... and kept on asking to move to another. Then the Sahrawi women were moved to an annex and we were given their cell, which was cool and infused with an intoxicating smell of women. It made us nostalgic... it represented lust but also the families we had lost. A sort of mother awoke in us all. We felt the women's presence, their sufferings and hopes. They had suffered the same lot as the men. They were there to sustain the men but also to be a source of suffering for them, of torture. Sahrawi men could not accept the suffering of their women. However, women bear suffering, privations and nightmares well. In prison they are stronger than men. They were beaten and insulted because the guards knew how it hurt the men. We could not bear them to be traumatised and thought of them as our sisters. They had left their first names on the wall. Like us, they had put marks on the walls. These little marks were loaded with significance - it was our only way to keep contact with the world outside. We were afraid of forgetting things and afraid of confusing dates.

So we'd begin to define our prison life. The ant kingdom was a vast field of observation for us... spiders suspended from the ceiling serenely wove their webs while we watched. They were fine traps for the hundreds of flies that launched assaults on us before sunrise. At first we tried to kill them, then we decided that their corpses attracted others and the more we killed the more would come. At that time there weren't any fleas or lice, but rats and cockroaches swarmed throughout the night.

One person came and showered us with insults and said "You haven't been here long and you're already complaining. Now you'll understand, you're cousins are covered in fleas and they don't complain". Then they left the door open - we didn't understand, it was the Sahrawis who came to us, it was very warm, embraces, so we mixed with them for about 20 days, there were all classes, peasants, herders, civil servants. They said that 25 people had died in that centre - we didn't understand how people died, we'd been thinking of a trial and then prison, in prison we'd be able to study - and now this was another reality which was completely new. Then we realised that we were outside Moroccan reality - everything they had said about democracy - the reality was worse.

We felt we had to do something, there had been three dead, on one day there had been two deaths...The whole prison caught an illness - only one person didn't get it. We called it the "Knee sickness", it attacked the lower body which became paralysed, it began with black spots on the soles of the feet and they became dry and you had diarrhoea. One of us had done medicine and he said the illness was from lack of Vitamin B12, a sickness of malnutrition, the stomach would swell. The youngest resisted for a time and helped the older ones, they fed them, washed their clothes, and helped them with their needs, but in the end everyone got it. Then there was a slight improvement and people got better.

We started a hunger strike to improve things. The young said that to do this was collective suicide since we were already on hunger strike. A lot were Bedouins and didn't know this way of struggle. But people were going about in blankets and with bare feet. We contacted everyone and made a list of what we wanted: we asked for more bread, sardines, one bar of soap per month, soap powder, to write to our family -that was surrealism - better conditions for the sick.... The captain, Lamrani, came, and in every room he found the same demands, so they gave in for a time and also allowed the Sahrawis out to do construction work in the prison or sweeping to recuperate.

After this they gave us an extra half loaf and half soap and half a sardine a month and transferred us to another house. They gave us some oil too, but they'd bring the pot and just pour a layer of oil on the top - it was some American aid oil, it gave us diarrhoea, it was poor oil. Once a guard, a more decent one, brought the pot and said "Take this". Then the Brigadier came and said, "And the dogs?" So he took the pot and when he came back it was half empty. So we realised that they fed the dogs first, from the same pan.

We spent our time telling jokes or telling our life histories. Soon we realised that we all knew each other's lives by heart - someone would begin a story any the others would say "You've already told us that".

The Sahrawis who were working outside brought us some sand and we used it to teach the illiterates - the *makhazini*, Belloukh, al-Oujdi, - to write.

Then one day someone new came, a Lebanese, he hammered at the door, then, when he was in the courtyard we recognised him. He had been in the Complex and then taken away, we had thought he was freed. At first we weren't sure as we had been blindfolded at the Complex, but after we were sure. Then he refused to eat, he asked for justice, and for his family, he asked what he was doing there, then one day they came, and said "Eat!" "No!" Then for about three hours we just heard screams, screams, screams, and then we heard, "OK, I'll eat." Next day when he came out to the toilet his face was blue, he'd been massacred. He said he was called Mohammed al-Marrakhshi, and he said Mohammed Fadi, but we never knew who he really was. Perhaps he was a double agent - he said he had worked for the PLO.

Then five boys and seven girls came - they put them in the same house. They were Sahrawis who had tried to leave Morocco to join the PLO at Tindouf. The youngest was 15 or 16 years old, Khadijatou. Then one day they said the *makhazini* would be freed - we felt a total emptiness, we were used to being 10 and three had gone, we felt torn apart, it's difficult to explain, we felt abandoned.

One day one of the guards gave us a tomato - the first we'd had for years. We divided it into seven and five and seven and one - into 20 pieces so everyone of us had a bit.

The youngest Sahrawi boy died. The day of his death was terrible for us. At first he had diarrhoea, he stopped eating, he got thinner and thinner, we tried to talk to him through the wall to lift his morale, but he couldn't talk, he said "If I come close, the guards will beat me".

We tried another means of communication. A friendly guard gave me a pencil and the Sahrawis who worked outside brought paper from the cement bags. We communicated with the Lebanese who communicated with the women's room. We also made a hole in the wall so as to talk directly with the Lebanese, like a telephone. The Lebanese didn't wash his own clothes, they were given to the Sahrawi women, so he hid letters in the clothes and they did the same. So then we planned an escape. About 50 Sahrawis agreed. We made a plan of the region. We calculated that we were 150 kilometres from the Algerian frontier - when we got out I looked at the map and found it was much further - so it was mad. But once I gave the letters to the Lebanese and he said the Brigadier found them. Two days later the guards came and beat up the Lebanese. Then they came to me and tortured me for 15 days - it was terrible, it was the first time that the idea of suicide came to me. The DST torture was nothing to this. They put me alone in a cell at Agdz for three months. Then one night there was a lot of noise, I heard lorries coming, and they blindfolded me and put me on a lorry. They bound our hands and feet tightly and tied them together, just as you do a beast, everyone was screaming. We drove about three hours and that's how we were transferred to Qal'at M'gouna.

In Qal'at M'gouna I was punished for my attempted flight, my rations reduced by half and in a cell by myself. Once they took us for a week to another place, it took a day to get there and we understood the king was coming to Ouarzazate and so they transferred us, perhaps they were afraid of something. It was an old school, there was a blackboard with Arabic grammar on it, but it was infernal, fleas everywhere. Then they brought us back to Qal'at M'gouna. I had no means of communicating with the others and I was anguished. I passed hour after hour imagining, sometimes I'd talk to myself because I was afraid of losing what makes a human being, the power of communicating. So one day I was sitting down and I found a small piece of charcoal which had fallen from the roof and I had the idea of drawing with it. It lasted three or four days. But I thought it was a very good idea to break the monotony - I had never drawn before, I made ink from coffee, and cement smeared with mud and a sort of brush from my trouser threads. So I began to draw, at first a little, then the whole day. But I had one eye on my drawing and another on the door as this was forbidden, so sometimes I'd have to rub out everything very quickly, before they came, otherwise they'd beat me.

After 18 months they took me out to my friends - it was a real liberation, as though I'd got out of prison - we wept, embraced...

We used to listen to the guards' conversations, one room was directly opposite and we could listen to their radio. We thought our fate was decided, we would die there and no one would know what had happened to us. We felt that at least if someone could testify to this we wouldn't mind. We only lived in the hope that someone would get out and tell what we had been through. We were in total despair.

Then one day, for the first time for eight years, they gave us oranges and olive oil. Then one morning, about 10am, everything was swept, the guards wore clean uniforms, their shoes were polished, they were well-shaved. They made a cell with a table and took us in one by one. It was Allad, someone from the DST, a black, from the palace. There was also al-Hajj, another officer, and a third we didn't know - but they had tortured us in the Complex. They looked at us as though they didn't recognize us, we had changed so much. They said to us: "OK, you're going to get out, but you've got no right to take part in any political organization. You're not allowed to talk about what you've lived through here. It's a royal amnesty. If you don't keep quiet, you'll go back". They said they'd come back the next day, but they didn't. We didn't sleep all night - it was as though that day lasted months. They took three of us, the next day they came back and took three more. They left al-Oujdi in the cell for the time.

They blindfolded us and put us in a landrover. We asked ourselves if we'd really be released or transferred to another prison. Then, a long drive they released Belloukh and we knew we were in El-Rachidia. They bought us tickets for the bus which went to Casablanca, through our home towns. It was 31 December, 1984.

**Testimony of Brahim Lahsen Mbarek Ballagh  
- arrested on 11 February 1981, released on June 23 1991:**

On the morning of 11 February 1981 a car (a Fiat 127, 5 doors, no number) stopped in front of my friend Tarouzi Sidi Salek and me while we were walking along a deserted road in Tan Tan. Some plainclothes people got out. They said they were security agents and told us to go along with them. They handcuffed and blindfolded us. They took us somewhere and interrogated us. They wanted to know everything about our activities and our supposed relations with the Polisario Front. They accused us of distributing leaflets and the national [Sahrawi] flag, burning government cars and belonging to underground organizations. As we didn't confess, they started torturing us, first with *falaqa* (the feet are tied and beaten with an electric cable and rubber laces). Other tortures followed: *le chiffon* (a "cloth", soaked in Javel - a strong disinfectant - is held against the mouth and nose to suffocation point); the long bench (consisting of tying someone to a bench and stuffing his mouth with the same cloth); the *avion* ("aeroplane"), the *poulet rôti* ("roast chicken") - in both these tortures the victim is suspended from a bar, either from the front or with their arms behind them; and the *courant d'air* ("draught") in which the naked victim is kept standing as long as possible.

On 27 March we were transferred to a detention centre in the Agadir district. We were with 16 other Sahrawi detainees, including two women. We didn't get enough food (a piece of bread and polluted water); and we continued to be tortured.

On 10 July 1981 we were transferred to Agdz centre, 80km from Ouarzazate. When we arrived we had to run a gauntlet of blows and kicks. The *makhazini* who guarded the prison were brutes. They treated old people, children, women and men all alike. We were kept in total darkness, night and day. Conditions were totally unhygienic. We waited for release or death.

We watched helplessly the agony of others and we couldn't do anything to help them. I remember that 28 Sahrawis died at Agdz. We weren't even allowed, with the little strength left to us, to organize their burial.

On 14 March 1982 we were moved to Qal'at M'gouna. Our situation got even worse in this terrible prison... a real concentration camp, like the Nazis'. The *makhazini* welcomed us brutally. We were kept in small rooms with 5-10 people. The guards did what they wanted with us but they weren't allowed to talk to us. We couldn't raise our eyes, if we did this, we'd be beaten. As regards the torture, the head of the camp would do whatever he wanted to. He'd say "You, and you, and you" and you'd go and find three or more guards with fan belts to beat you. It was arbitrary - sometimes you wouldn't be tortured, sometimes it would happen two or three times a week. The food was terrible - six or seven lentils in

water. We were undernourished, badly treated, terrible chronic diseases appeared (rheumatism, tuberculosis, kidney infections, heart problems, psychological disorders...). Many of our comrades died, and we later heard that they were buried in a common grave.

This situation lasted till 1985 - the day when King Hassan II decided to visit Sahrawi territory - then it began to change, little by little. After the famous meeting of Hassan II with the Polisario Front in 1989 they began to improve the situation a bit more, they built big rooms, they brought detergent to wash clothes, they gave us two rations of meat per week, they brought detergent for the WC. They gave us a nurse, but he was illiterate. In 1990 Dahi Najem died... the last of those killed by Hassan II at Qal'at M'gouna. Then in April 1991 things got much better and in June 1991 we were surprised to be visited by a DST commission headed by Allal Saadaoui, Governor of Ouarzazate, who told us that our group would be freed on 23 June.

But are we really free? Ever since we left Qal'at M'gouna we've been constantly harassed, threatened and spied on. Our movements are watched and sometimes forbidden. We need authorization to move. Many of us have been put under house arrest at Laayoune, Smara and Dakhla. Some have been threatened with death. We've been forbidden to communicate with foreigners. Some have been sent back to prison -that happened to Ballah Khatri El Bouhali, arrested on 11 January 1992 in Smara.

**Testimony of Kenti Sidi Balla**  
**- arrested 19 June 1987, released in August 1991:**

I was arrested on 19 June 1987 as I was trying to cross to the Polisario front. We were caught by Moroccan soldiers guarding the wall which Morocco built in Western Sahara. The soldiers gave me a beating with their guns and took me to a post where I was interrogated. Next day they handed me over to the *gendarmarie royale*; there I was tortured and interrogated in turn for 24 hours. All the time I was blindfolded, with my hands bound. Then I was taken somewhere, I don't know where, after a long, painful and humiliating journey. Afterwards I was transferred to another centre, a building in Skoura, where there were 14 other Sahrawis, including women.

The Skoura centre was an old mud building with walls half a metre wide. There was a window for ventilation which was open for all the two winters I spent there. They chained us together in twos with heavy chains, it was even difficult to go to the toilet. They didn't allow us to speak to each other or to go outside the cells or to look out of the window. They used to beat us without any reason and anyone going to the toilet would be beaten by four or five guards on the way there and on the way back. We spent two years in Skoura. We found traces indicating that some people were there before us, we found traces of blood and

very small writing on the walls. It seemed as though it had been written by an educated man, I didn't find his name but I noticed that the numbers were written in Arabic<sup>3</sup>. There were also dirty marks indicating that someone had been sitting attached to the wall for years. Some of us wrote on the walls too - when they discovered that we were severely beaten. We were there for two years from March 1988 to March 1990. I was a bitter experience. I started to have nightmares and to see ghosts. After that I lost my memory and began to be delirious, so the guards punished me as I wasn't allowed to speak.

The walls were full of cracks and during the winter of 1989 some of the wall fell down and a lot of water came in. For a whole night we were scooping out water. In the winter of 1990 the next-door room fell in so they moved the prisoners in it to the next room and the following month they transferred us all, blindfold and handcuffed, to Qal'at M'gouna.

At Qal'at M'gouna we weren't allowed to communicate with the Sahrawis already detained there, we didn't even know about them. They brought along four other Sahrawis, but they were in a separate cell and we couldn't communicate with them. So we decided to go on hunger strike to ask to meet a high-ranking officer and to be allowed to communicate with the other four. A high-ranking officer did come and allowed us to meet and soon after that we were released. But all that time we had no contact with any of the other Sahrawis detained at Qal'at M'gouna, all our group of 22 men and women were separated in Building 6.

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<sup>3</sup> Most Moroccans and other Maghrebis write numerals in the European style; people from other parts of the Middle East (Libya, Lebanon, for instance) use Arabic numerals proper.

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**SAHRAWIS WHO DIED IN SECRET DETENTION IN  
AGDZ, QAL'AT M'GOUNA AND LAAYOUNE BETWEEN  
1976 AND 1990**

**Those who died at Agdz (1976-1979)**

<b>name</b>	<b>date of death</b>
1. Haboub ould Mailid ould Sidi Ali	7.11.75
2. Benasser ould Hmeidnah	27.11.75
3. Mohamed Said ould Abeid ould Chaabane	27.6.76
4. Baira ould M'barek ould Hsaina ould Mansour	30.8.76
5. Al-Dih ould Mahjoub El Yagouti	2.9.76
6. Brahim ould Bouzid ould Lahbib	Sept. 76
7. Mohamed Mabarak ould Sidi Mouloud	Sept. 76
8. Mohamed Lamine ould Hamma	Sept. 76
9. Cheikh ould Bechir ould Hamadi	23.9.76
10. Hamdi ould Bouzid ould Rabani	15.10.76
11. Charamha Ahmed ould Bachir	Oct. 76
12. Khatari ould Habadi	18.10.76
13. Nafaa ould Abdellahi ould Mayara	21.10.76
14. Naaja ment Ali ould Barhouma	11.11.76
15. Mohamed Maa Al-Ainein ould Larossi	Jan. 77
16. Alouat ould Taher	Jan. 77
17. Al-Ballal ould Lahbib ould al-Ballal	25.3.77
18. Moumen ould Ahmed Nah	1977
19. Damiri Ayad ould Mohamed	19.5.77
20. Abeid ould Souhaili	1977
21. Baouba ould Ali ould Kaouri	9.6.77
22. Batoul ment Sidi ould Sidi Ali	17.6.77
23. Heiba ould Mayara	28.9.77
24. El Mahdi ould Ahmed ould Lahcen	29.9.77
25. Jeyyid ould Mamoud ould Karkoub	21.10.77
26. Chigali ould Magiya	23.7.78
27. Aslama ould Ali ould Abba Lahcen	2.11.79

**Those who died at Qal'at M'gouna (1980-1990)**

28. Mohamed Cheikhould Mohamed Salamould Boukhari	23.9.80
29. Ahmed Lasouielemould Terfass	23.1.81
30. Salekould Abdessamad	27.5.83
31. Mohamedould Brahimould Badda	13.11.85(?)
32. Lahbibould Ahmed Lahcen	17.4.86
33. Mahjoubould Larossiould Lamdeimigh	18.5.86
34. Sidatould Mohamedould Lakouara	25.5.86
35. Mohamed Najemould Beidi	June 86
36. Mohamedould Abdellahiould Sidi Larossi	2.7.86
37. Najemould Ahmed Lahcen	3.3.87
38. Abdelaliould Abdelmajid	18(?).3.87
39. El Ouanatould Omar Lamseiti	(?)3.3.87
40. Jdoudould Lakhlifi	18.6.89
41. Salkaould Abdallah	19.12.89
42. Mohamedould Abdallahould Mansour	21.12.89
43. Dahiould Mohamed Najem	1990

**Those who died at Laayoune (1985-1991)**

1. Fatimatou ment Baadould Ahmed Salem	3.85
2. Mohamedould Khalil Ayach	30.11.87
3. Boumehdi Andallah	12.89
4. Salamaould Hmeiya	4.90
5. Karoum Mohamed Ali	9.90

Moulay Ahmedould Moulay el-Hassan el-Leili, who washed the bodies of those who died at Agdz and Qal'at M'gouna, died on 22 June 1991, the day after his release. Before he died he recited the names of the dead and the dates of their deaths.