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Morocco/Western Sahara: Time for inquiry into Ben Barka's "disappearance"

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On the eve of the 38th anniversary of the "disappearance" in Paris of leading left-wing activist Mehdi Ben Barka, Amnesty International calls on the Moroccan authorities to take the long-overdue step of launching an investigation into the case.

As members of the Moroccan Human Rights Association, the Moroccan Human Rights Organization and the Forum for Truth and Justice travel to Paris in a caravan of remembrance to highlight the need for action, Amnesty International expresses its continuing solidarity with their courageous and determined struggle for truth and justice.

In the light of the serious allegations about the Moroccan authorities' role in the "disappearance" of Mehdi Ben Barka made last year by retired security agent Ahmed Boukhari, there can be no excuse for the authorities continuing to ignore the call for a full, impartial and independent investigation into state involvement in the disappearance of the opposition figure.

The time has also come for the Moroccan authorities to allow Ahmed Boukhari to travel to Paris to testify before a French judicial inquiry into the "disappearance". Boukhari has been summoned on four separate occasions to appear at hearings into the case. Each time he has been unable to attend because the Moroccan authorities continue to refuse to renew his passport. Boukhari has been challenging this decision before a court of law.

The case of Mehdi Ben Barka is only one among the hundreds of "disappearance" cases, which occurred between the mid-1960s and the early 1990s and which remain unresolved today. Amnesty International has publicly welcomed the series of positive initiatives undertaken by the Moroccan authorities in recent years to improve the human rights situation, including awarding financial compensation to several hundred relatives of the "disappeared" and former "disappeared". However, thorough, impartial and independent investigations have not been opened to shed light on the truth about these grave and systematic human rights violations and to establish responsibility for them.

Human rights activists in Morocco/Western Sahara have been actively campaigning to end the

immense suffering of relatives of the "disappeared", forced to live for years on end without knowing the fate of their loved ones. Since last year, the Moroccan Human Rights Association, the Moroccan Human Rights Organization and the Forum for Truth and Justice have been coordinating their activities on "disappearances" and other grave human rights violations of the past in a bid to send out a strong message on the urgent need for immediate action to be taken to clarify the truth about these crimes.

If the authorities are to fulfill their stated commitment to addressing the wrongs of the past, they must take this message seriously.

Background

Opposition activist Mehdi Ben Barka was abducted in Paris on 29 October 1965 and subsequently "disappeared". Ahmed Boukhari, a former member of Morocco's secret services, began making revelations in 2001, alleging that Mehdi Ben Barka died while being interrogated in a villa south of Paris by Moroccan secret service agents and that his body was then flown back to Morocco and dissolved in acid.

Ahmed Boukhari this year published a book, which sets out in great detail an account of the last hours of Mehdi Ben Barka. Boukhari claims an intimate knowledge of the case through his former role in the counter-subversion department of the secret services, which he claims was responsible for thousands of abductions, followed by secret detention and torture. Since making his revelations, Boukhari has found himself the subject of several defamation cases. Some of the plaintiffs are former colleagues, angry at his portrayal of them as state agents involved in grave and systematic human rights violations over a number of years.

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