

15 November 2021

### **Western Sahara: Continued detention and judicial harassment against human rights defenders Hamza Bouhriga, Jamal Ahrouch and Jalal Bouchaab**

On 9 November 2021, the Court of Appeals in Gulemim rescheduled the appeal hearing of human rights defenders **Hamza Bouhriga** and **Jamal Ahrouch** to 16 November 2021, based on the request of the human rights defenders' defence. Human rights defender **Jalal Bouchaab**, also implicated in the same case, is scheduled to be heard before the Court of First Instance of Gulemim on 15 November 2021.

[Hamza Bouhriga](#) is a human rights defender and advocate for Sahrawi rights and students rights. He is also a member of the preparatory committee of the Sahrawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA). He has taken part in denunciations against the imprisonment of Sahrawi human rights defenders and has worked on documenting Sahrawi student activities. [Jamal Ahrouch](#) is a human rights defender and advocate for Sahrawi rights and labour rights, and is also a member of the preparatory committee of CODESA. As a trade unionist, he is involved with the Field Coordination of Unemployed Sahrawi. [Jalal Bouchaab](#) is a human rights defender and advocate for Sahrawi rights and student rights, as well as being a member of the preparatory committee of CODESA. He has worked on denouncing the imprisonment of Sahrawi human rights defenders and documented Sahrawi student activities.

On 9 November 2021, upon the request of their defence, the Court of Appeals in Gulemim rescheduled the appeal hearing of Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch to 16 November 2021. Human rights defender Jalal Bouchaab, also implicated in the same case, is scheduled to be heard before the Court of First Instance of Gulemim on 15 November 2021. On 4 November 2021, Hamza Bouhriga and Jamal Ahrouch attended a virtual session with the Criminal Chamber of Gulemim, which was indicting them on the charge of alleged "unlawful assembly". The video and sound quality during the session was of extremely poor quality, making it difficult for them to be heard by the Prosecutor and vice versa. It has been noted by human rights defenders in Western Sahara that these types of sessions are increasingly used against political prisoners and Sahrawi human rights defenders and it means the judges have leeway in freely interpreting what the defendants statements were in the call.

The continued judicial harassment and detention of the three human rights defenders is in relation to their arrest on 14 September 2021. Hamza Bouhriga, Jamal Ahrouch and Jalal Bouchaab were each arrested at their residences under the charge "unlawful assembly" after they took part in peaceful demonstration in Gulemim on 9 September 2021. They were presented before the Public Prosecutor in Gulemim on 16 September 2021, before being transferred to the prison in Bouizakarne, Gulemim.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the continued detention and judicial harassment against human rights defenders Hamza Bouhriga, Jamal Ahrouch and Jalal Bouchaab as it believes they are being targeted solely as a result of their human rights work defending, protecting and promoting Sahrawi rights, and exercising their right to freedom of association and expression.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:**

1. Immediately release Hamza Bouhriga, Jamal Ahrouch and Jalal Bouchaab and drop all charges against them as they are solely motivated by their work in defence of Sahrawi rights;

2. Ensure that the treatment of Sepideh Gholian while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Western Sahara are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions [including judicial harassment].

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