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Saharawi Children and Students under occupation



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Introduction

Over four decades have passed since the invasion of Western Sahara by the Moroccan Kingdom in October 1975. The status of this non-autonomous territory has not changed and it is clearly defined not only by the UN Resolutions¹ as well as the International Court², the African Union³ and the Court of Justice of the European Union⁴. Morocco has no sovereignty over the territory although it is the administrative power *in facto*, Spain did not fulfil the decolonization process and the International Community, especially the United Nations, were not able so far to put in place the Referendum for self-determination that was the base of the cease fire agreement in 1991 between the Moroccan Kingdom and the POLISARIO FRONT. The census was completed in 1992 by MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the

Referendum in Western Sahara)⁵, due to the obstacles put forward by Morocco the final list was confirmed in 1997 in Houston, where the UN Special Envoy Mr. James Baker III announced on September 16 that the parties involved in the conflict came to an agreement that laid the groundwork for an end to their dispute over Western Sahara by agreeing to a code of conduct governing a referendum that would decide the fate of the territory⁶.

The abuse of the human rights of children is widespread in modern armed conflict and broadly reported in social media. The conflict in Western Sahara, though, has not the same exposure, nor do the media report, nor access, the occupied territory due to the imposed media blackout by the Moroccan Kingdom, who only allows the entry of International media who “obey” the

¹ <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/western-sahara/>

² <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/61>

³ <http://www.usc.es/en/institutos/ceso/UA-Commission.html>

⁴ <http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?jsessionid=9ea7d2dc30d5a57b201e09f24856b7bad0b327fbc322.e34KaxiLc3gMb40Rch0SaxyKbx10?text=&docid=186489&pageIndex=0&doclang=en&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=6228781>

And

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:62016CJ0266&from=EN>

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<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=208458&pageIndex=0&doclang=fr&mode=lst&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=270552>

⁵ <https://minurso.unmissions.org>

⁶ https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Urgent_Action/apic_62897.html



agenda and program elaborated by the Moroccan governmental branches, as well as supervise the media's contact with the population.

This report aims to show the situation in which children and young Saharawi live in the occupied territories and the impact that this occupation has on their daily life and future.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷ and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child⁸ and the International Humanitarian Law⁹ are violated daily in the occupied territories, where the absence of a UN protection mechanism, UNICEF or the International Red Cross leaves the Saharawi population and, in this case, especially the younger generations at the whim and mercy of the Moroccan authorities and Moroccan Settlers.

Schools are protected under the two bodies of international law: international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

International human rights law, which is applicable at times of war and peace, provides for the right to education.

When it is stated that schools are “protected,” it should not only apply to the protection against armed attacks of the buildings, but also that they should be a safe haven for Children and Students. When this right to enjoy education in a safe environment is breached, it is likely to result in children dropping out of school, lower rates of transition to higher education, and poorer educational outcomes which will have a huge impact in the future of these pupils and students as well as resulting in trauma, anxiety, and a low sense of self-esteem. The “arms” here are not bombs or mines, but the torture, humiliations, physical and psychological attacks and violent discipline.

The right to their cultural heritage is also denied by the Moroccan schools who teach the “official” version of history rewriting the facts, denying, for example, the crimes committed during the invasion, such as the bombing of the Saharawi population with white phosphorus and Napalm and reinventing a Moroccan Empire in the school books. Children and Students who reaffirm their Saharawi Identity are punished in

⁷ <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

⁹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law>



different ways, aiming to eradicate the desire to live as a Saharawi.

The Saharawi who pursue their studies have to go to the Moroccan Kingdom, since there is only a recently opened private university in Western Sahara. The discrimination continues in the university and accompanies the young Saharawi back to Western Sahara when they have their degrees and search for employment.

No official data is available on Saharawi population other than the census made by the UN. All data since the occupation is “integrated”; Morocco forced the Saharawi to adopt the Moroccan nationality and so it is able to manipulate all statistics which are therefore not reliable concerning the Saharawi population.

The population in Western Sahara has the letters SH in front of the number on their ID cards, which applies to all residents, Moroccan settlers and Saharawi and, therefore, cannot be an element to differentiate data.

Methodology

This report was written and the research and field work performed by Isabel Lourenço, human rights activist, member of Fundación Sahara Occidental and collaborator of porunsaharalibre.org. The lack of data on the occupied territories, and in particular regarding children and youth were the reason to make more detailed inquiries and to compile the necessary information for this report. This need was evident since the first contacts Mrs. Lourenço had with children and heard their testimonies.

Due to the absence of previous data, the report is based on field work performed over the span of five years (since 2013) and interviews made during this time in Western Sahara, Agadir, Marrakesh and Rabat, Spain and France, as well as questionnaires and interviews that have been answered between January 2017 and September 2018 by 150 children (ages 6-15) and 150 students (age 16-24).

The pattern of violence experienced in the occupied territories by children and young Saharawi was very clear after two dozen interviews, however to confirm and improve the research data, 300 questionnaires were made.

The interviews and questionnaires conducted outside Western Sahara in case of the children were made during their holidays or family visits, but all of them live and go to school in the Occupied territories. The University Students interviewed are scattered throughout Moroccan Universities, over 70% of the interviewed are or were enrolled in Marrakesh and Agadir, the remaining in Rabat, Tangier and Casablanca.

The children and students were all informed about the goal of the questionnaires and interviews as well as their parents, in the case of minors.

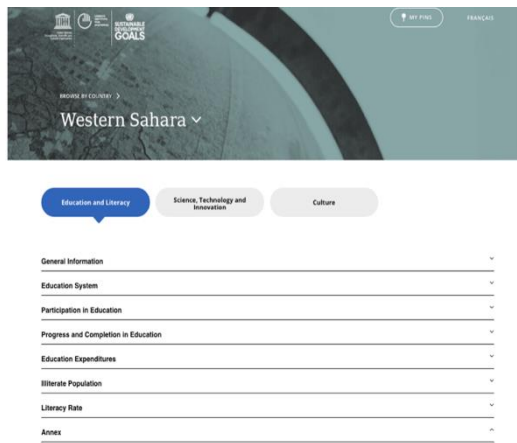
The occupied territories are under strict surveillance of the Moroccan authorities therefore all field work was made with great difficulties since all movements of foreigners and Saharawi are monitored.

Mrs. Lourenço was expelled from the occupied territories in 2015 by the Moroccan authorities and had to continue the recollection of data in meetings outside the territories, through video calls and with the help of local students. Even in Morocco, Mrs. Lourenço was always under surveillance and meetings had to be conducted with extreme caution.



The interviews were conducted either directly or by video conference and WhatsApp, whenever necessary translation was made by two Saharawi university students.

Most names of in the report were changed to protect the Children and Students.



Screen shot of UNESCO website where all data on education and literacy concerning Western Sahara are blank. (<http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/eh?theme=education-and-literacy>)

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who provided me with the possibility to complete this report. A special gratitude I give to all the children and students that have trusted me throughout these years. Maryam and Saadani for their translations and helping gathering the information. Balla for his endless support and patience, CODAPSO for logistical support in the occupied territories.

Furthermore, I would also like to acknowledge with much appreciation the crucial role of Porunsaharalibre.org and Fundación Sahara Occidental, Fito Tombo, José Manuel de La Fuente and Rosario Garcia Diaz who are steadfast in their support and advise. To Terry Bremer for all the editing and helpfulness.

A special thanks to my friends and family, who never complain and always are there for me.

1-Children in Saharawi Culture

Saharawi children live in a very protected environment inside their society and family structure. The ill-treatment of children, as well as women, is prohibited in Saharawi culture and extremely rare in contrast to Moroccan society and culture where the violence against women and children is a daily practice. Once again, Official National Statistics are not available ¹⁰ for women, but the UNICEF report on Morocco ¹¹ states that 90% of children aged 2 to 14 years has experienced violent discipline. Hierarchy in the Saharawi society and family is linked to each generation; for example, the older members are always respected, the rules of behaviour and how one should address each member of the society are very well defined.

Girls and young women are incentivized to study and are seen as equal in the academic as well as political and social arena. Parents strive to give equal opportunities, and academic knowledge is valued.

The Saharawi culture is deeply rooted in the family life not only through

daily rituals and traditions, but also through values of solidarity, sharing, helping, respect and tolerance that are transmitted from childhood and engrained as a tool of survival of the society.

The violence experienced at the hands of the Moroccan authorities and settlers is therefore an experience that is even more shocking and the sense of terror is heightened.

They do not respect us ... they beat our mothers in the street, our little brothers and sisters. You know for Saharawi to beat a woman or a child is 1000 times worse than to beat a man, - the Moroccans have no honour, they want to humiliate us, to kill us all, our ways do not suit them, they do not want peaceful people or united people-they want people who fight each other; they see woman and children like animals. They see us as an obstacle, they wish our death and they tell us in school, in the streets, in the market, everywhere. They are the occupier not we, this is our land. Why does the UN allow this? The

¹⁰ <http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/africa/morocco>

¹¹ <https://data.unicef.org/country/mar/#>



soldiers and employees of MINURSO see us, they see what happens, they don't care, they are only interested in their beach weekends and living in nice hotels and having their salaries. If their children would suffer would they be silent too???

*Mouloud 16 years, Dakhla -occupied
Western Sahara*

2-The exposure to violence Ages 6 to 15

Saharawi Children are exposed to daily violence in direct and indirect forms. Abductions, torture, day and night raids, detentions of themselves or family members, friends and neighbours were reported by all children contacted.

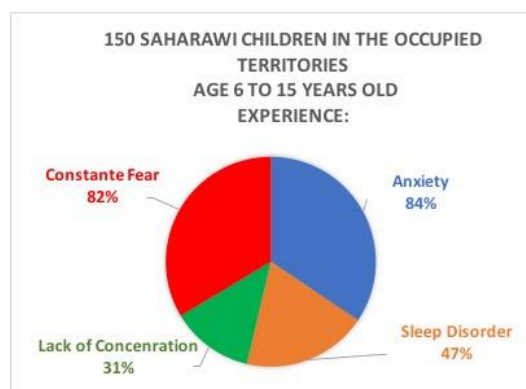
“We are never safe, not in the school, not on the street and not even at home. They can come any moment and take you or beat you. In school they insult us, beat us, they want us to think that we are stupid, useless, that the Moroccan children are better. Some of the Moroccan children behave the same as the adults; they are never punished when they are bad to us. I can’t sleep, I always have things in my head and in my heart; sometimes my heart beats so fast I can’t breathe.

Kamal 11 year, .El Aaiun -occupied Western Sahara

The 150 children aged 6 to 15 years who answered the questionnaire reported all some kind of trauma, 84% reported to suffer from anxiety which they describe as the sensation of not being able to breath, raised heart rate, and a state of “constant unrest”.

82% feel constant fear, the sensation of not being safe, and that all can happen at any moment, looking around and not trusting any settler or Moroccan authority.

The inability to properly focus and concentrate was reported by 31%, while 47% are unable to have a regular sleep pattern, either by not being able to fall asleep, by lying awake for the greater part of the night, or by waking up several times during the night in a state of “alertness”; also, nightmares are frequent.



It was night, I woke up screaming. My sister held me very, very tightly. They entered the house breaking the door and they destroyed everything, they beat everyone. My mother was on the floor with a lot of blood on her face; I was very afraid. They had black “masks” over their heads, I only saw the eyes and the



boots, they kicked her so much, like a dog. They all had guns.

Amira, 8 years old, Boujadour - occupied Western Sahara

Day and night raids into Saharawi houses are frequent, a warrant or other legal document is never shown and modus operandi is that of mercenary forces. The use of “black ski masks” was one of the things that marked the children most. They are used to seeing Moroccan occupation authorities everywhere with military or police uniforms and with guns, including at school, but the “ski masks” confer an added terror effect.

32,6% witnessed day raids into houses of their neighbours while 66% were themselves victims of one of those raids. 49% witnessed night raids in neighbours’ houses and 2% reported night raids in their own homes.

The destruction of the Saharawi property by the Moroccan authorities is a daily event but also houses are set on fire, although not as frequently. Even so, 4,6% of the children witnessed arson by the Moroccan authorities and one experienced it, recalling “it was the most

horrible day of my life. We didn’t have much, now we have nothing”.

In the Cities of the occupied territories, Saharawi continue their non-violent *intifada*¹² with demonstrations, spraying of slogans on walls, painting of the Flags of the SADR (Saharawi Arabic Democratic Republic) and meetings. The demonstrations are always on main streets to be more visible, but also to protect the protesters, especially the women from being sexually assaulted; these attacks usually occur on side streets.

59,3% of the children have actively participated in demonstrations. 96,6% witnessed beatings of Saharawi by the Moroccan authorities in the street and 87,3% witnessed sexual harassment/molestation. One of the techniques employed by the Moroccan authorities is the act of brutal twisting the nipples of the women’s breasts in public and touching them, as well as ripping off their traditional clothing, the Melfa. One of the girls answering the questionnaire reported to have been sexually molested.

“They surrounded me after school, five of them, in a side street. They shoved me

12 Arabic *intifāda*, literally, the act of shaking off, also often translated as civil disobedience or resistance; uprising



to the ground and made me touch them, with my hands and my mouth. I'm so ashamed I cannot say anything. I washed my hands and my mouth, even with bleach, I was sick. I can't forget the smell of them. I tried to think about something else but I couldn't. They changed me ... please do not tell my parents!"

M. 13 years old, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

The abduction and arbitrary arrest of Saharawi, even children, is another reality with which the children are confronted.

Abductions occur on the streets when police cars pull up and "detain" someone without presenting any legal document or warrant, the person is then transported to unknown location and neither family nor lawyers are informed about the whereabouts of this person (adult or minor). The abduction can take hours or days. Several children reported having been taken to the outskirts of El Aaiun, but others say they were in some kind of official building.

In the questionnaire, 86,6% of the children say that they have witnessed abductions and four of them were victims of abduction.

I was playing in the street near my house when a police car came and four men exited. They beat me and put me inside the car. I was taken to the outskirts of El Aaiun. They said, "Say: 'Long live the King, sing the anthem!'" ...I said everything they wanted, but I was nervous and didn't sing the anthem right. They took off my shoes and my trousers. I had to crawl on all fours and they kicked and insulted me. They beat me so hard... I don't know how much time passed. When they left, I had to go back to town barefoot."

B. 14 years, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

School should be a place of education, but also a place of safety and development. Children should be able to express their opinions and views, and ask their questions. The goal of school is to educate and prepare children for the future giving them the tools to become active and productive members of society. Yet once again, the reality of Saharawi children in the occupied territories is quite different.

It was shocking to hear from most of the children that "there is one teacher that isn't bad to me". Teachers are just another tool of repression and perceived as "dangerous", "untrustworthy" and as



an “authority” in the sense of “occupation authority”.

99,3% of the children answered that they had witnessed beatings and insults of Saharawi children by Moroccan teachers. 78% of the children have experienced first-hand insults or beatings.

The most reported insults used were: “dirty Saharawi and stupid Saharawi”, insults to the children’s mothers. Humiliations in front of the other students occur in almost all classes where Saharawi children are outnumbered by Moroccan settlers’ children. The message transmitted by the school staff through its behaviour is that Saharawi children are “worthless”, less intelligent and that ill treatment of Saharawi has no punishment, in fact it is seen as “normal” and “authorized”.

The Moroccan national anthem is sung every day in primary school. This is always mentioned by the Saharawi children as if it is a punishment or insult. Even the younger children mention this part of the school day as the most negative. Saharawi children who make some kind of mistake singing the anthem are punished even harder than Moroccan children.

I made a mistake, and stopped singing, the teacher hit me with a stick. He pulled

me by my hair in front of all my colleagues, he pulled me by my hair to the principal’s office. It hurt so much and I had blood on my head, I tripped but he continued to pull even when I was on the floor. The principle called my parents and said that I was a bad student, a bad girl. I hate school.

F, 10 years, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

In class Saharawi children are not incentivised to ask questions, to ask questions usually results in humiliation and insults.

In History classes, the history of Western Sahara is simply ignored or presented according to the Moroccan version: *provinces of the south* which always were part of the great Moroccan empire. One of the girls laughed when she told how history was taught, “They really think that we believe all this!!! Don’t they know that we can google everything and that there are websites on history?” Another boy said, “They say they freed us, such liars! When you free somebody you do not kill them, bomb them, rob them and change their names and take away their papers. That is not freedom, that is war!”

Hayat, 13 wants to be a lawyer and have a law firm. She is reading the



articles of Children's Rights and making her analysis:

Article 4: IMPLEMENTATION OF RIGHTS / Article 13: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

We study in school that to express an opinion is a right of the child. So, when the Saharawi child expresses his opinion outside of his house and comes back with a black eye ... his rights are not implemented.

So, would this child trust his school again? They say it is our right and then violate this right!

Article 7: NAME AND NATIONALITY

The Saharawi child is registered as a Moroccan citizen immediately after birth; we can see that in the civil status identification papers..., but this is a lie, we should be registered as Saharawi citizens. Our nationality is false on the papers.

95,3% of the interviewed children have witnessed harassment of Saharawi children by Moroccan authorities inside the courtyard and/or at the exit of the school. 11,3% denounced having been "The police pick you up in the hospital and bring you for interrogation; we cannot trust the people in the hospital."

followed by police in uniform or plain clothes (secret police). "You know the ones that wear the suits, those are the most dangerous, they give the orders!" says Khawla, 8 years old.

The hospital is another place of discrimination. El Mehdi the civil hospital of El Aaiun is known by the Saharawi as "the butcher shop" or "the experiment lab". Saharawi are discriminated against even here and victims of medical neglect and mal practice.

9 years old Mohamed's arm was broken by several police men who beat him in the street. In hospital, he had to undergo surgery, but no anaesthesia or painkiller was given to him. This is common practice and most Saharawi prefer not to go the hospital and use traditional medicines because they are always afraid of what can be done to them in the hospital. "I was very afraid when we left my mother in the hospital. They do not like us, they treat us only a little better when we give them money; we always have to pay to everyone," said S, 15 years old. Brahim, 11 years old, said his older brother refused to go to hospital:



Violence and repression are ever present in the lives of these children, 96% have witnessed the arrest of a close relative, friend or neighbour. 96,6% witnessed

family members, friend or neighbours being beaten by the Moroccan authorities, while 99% have witnessed them being insulted.

UNICEF says that the torture of children “occurs in different contexts, including police operations against children seen as a threat to public order or safety; children confined in prisons or detention facilities; and children seen as linked to subversive groups, including the children of militants” (O’Donnell and Liwski 2010: 28). Police forces may also use torture to extract information and confessions. Non-physical punishment that “belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child” is cruel and degrading and incompatible with the CRC (Committee on the Rights of the Child’s 2006 General Comment)

The prohibition of torture is an absolute right – this means that it cannot be derogated from, or excused for, any reason. Torture, as opposed to abuse, is committed by an agent of the state for a specific reason, and causes severe pain or suffering.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted that detention causes serious harm to children (see above link, p.5). Importantly, Article 37 (b) explicitly provides that deprivation of liberty, including arrest, detention and imprisonment, should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, so that the child’s right to development is fully respected and ensured.

The lawful arrest or detention of children can only take place under certain circumstances. It must be proportionate and only carried out in certain situations, including, for example, detention following court conviction; arrest or detention for failing to observe a court order/legal obligation; and arrest or detention on remand (when due to come before a court) (see also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (article 9 onwards).



Saharawi children are aware of what torture means. Torture is a recurrent theme in the conversations in Saharawi houses since almost every family has an ex-political prisoner or a current political prisoner in jail; in the aftermath of the Gdeim Izik camp dismantlement in 2010¹³, hundreds of Saharawi were detained and tortured. An arrest is almost always accompanied by torture, so it is not surprising that 90% of the children said that they had witnessed physical torture. Five of them denounced having been victims of physical torture. 83,3% witnessed psychological torture and 8% were victims of psychological torture.

Between October and November 2010, during the Gdeim Izik protest camp the harassment in schools was enormous. Saharawi children were victims of interrogatories by teachers and police in school. There are even reports of children and students being arrested inside the schools. Children whose family members were at the camp were specially targeted and singled out for daily repression and humiliations.

In 2010, in school they separated us from the Moroccan children. We were

put in two lines and they yelled at us: you are murderers! You are dogs, you are nothing, you are worthless!

And the Moroccan children were allowed to ill treat us.

Can you imagine? I saw an American movie about bullying, what they did in that movie is nothing compared with what we suffer every day. I will never forget....

Some of my cousins were not even 18 years old and they were tortured in those days.

Selma, 18 years – El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

Article 6: SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT

Article number 6 provides that children are allowed to stay until puberty in optimal conditions for their development including through the fight against child mortality, which doesn't exist in Western Sahara, - so let me remind you about the child who was killed at the hand of a Moroccan police officer in the events of Gdeim Izik. He was my age.

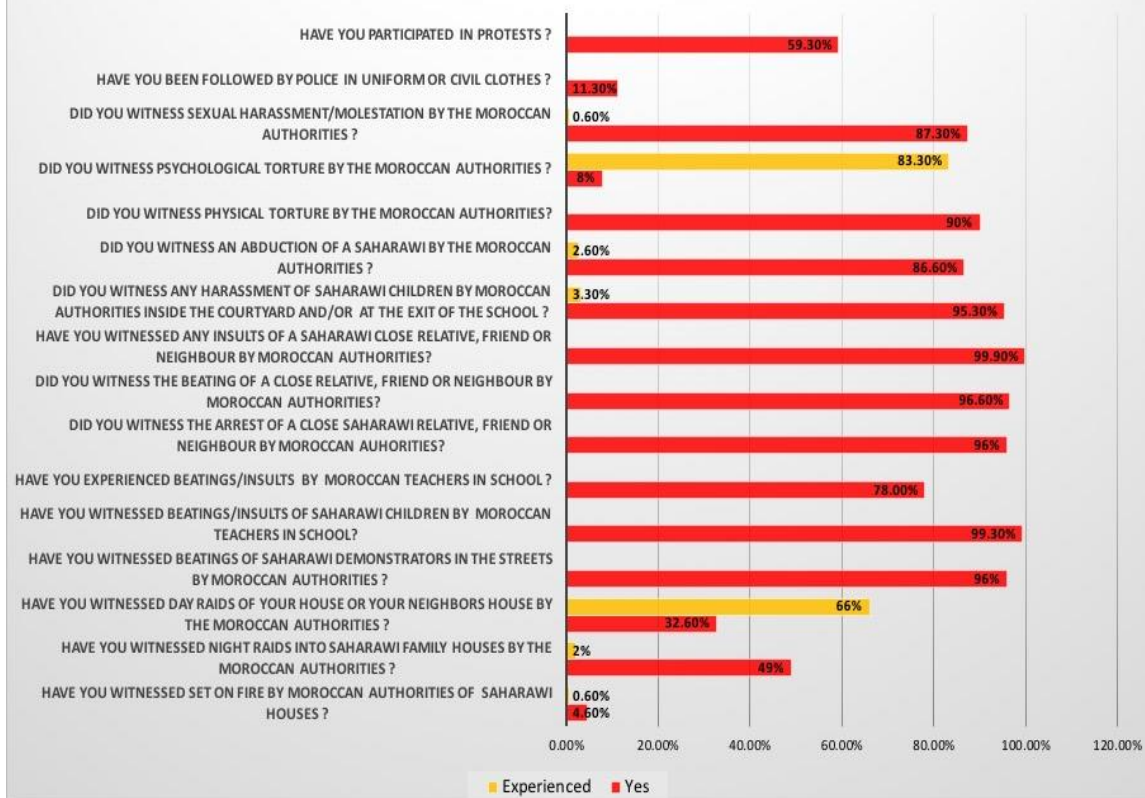
Hayat, 13 years, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

¹³ https://porunsaharalibre.org/contenido-blog/uploads/2017/09/THE-GDEIM-IZIK-CASE_IL-20092017sem-wv-1.pdf



Saharawi children in occupied territories exposure to violence Ages 6 to 15

Questionnaire answered by
150 Saharawi Children in the occupied territories
Aged 6 to 15 years (67 female/83 male)



3-MINURSO

Saharawi children feel unprotected by the International Community. They are fully aware that they live in a non-autonomous territory that is occupied by Moroccan military, police and settlers. The presence of MINURSO, the United Nations mission, is obvious since the employees and uniformed personnel are all over the towns, cafés, hotels and streets with identified vehicles, although the license plates are Moroccan.

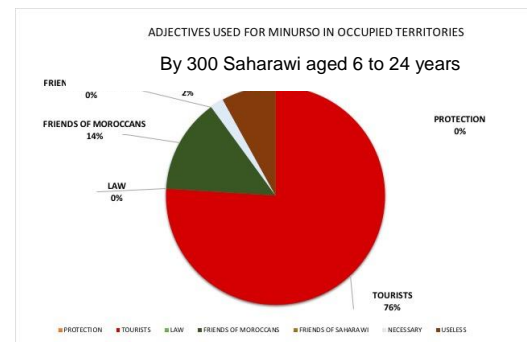
When questioned about the role of MINURSO in the occupied territories and the adjectives that could be used, immediately the answer of 76% was “Tourists”. Children and young Saharawi alike did not relate MINURSO with Law or Protection, nor as “friends”. 14% perceive them as friends of the Moroccans, due to the relationships they observe between MINURSO personnel and Moroccan settlers and their “friendly behaviour” with Moroccan military and police.

8% find MINURSO completely useless.

“They are good for the café near my school. The owner already opened another café; he says that they are very good costumers. That is what they are

good for - to help the Moroccans, they don't care about us.”

Abdeljalil, 15 years , Smara - occupied Western Sahara



4-From Secondary School to University (ages 16 to 24)

In secondary school the pattern repeats itself, young Saharawi continue to be discriminated against. The Moroccan national anthem is not song in the morning but the ritual of humiliations and ill treatment continues.

These young Saharawi are more aware of the political side of the occupation; they see not only the violence but identify the patterns and the goals of the abuse and violence.

The Moroccans try to makes us believe that we are worthless. They want us to consume drugs and become addicts; to be like robots, not thinking, not dreaming, and not struggling. It's not by chance, it is intentional. They want to do to us what the Americans did to the Indians. To put us in ghettos, to makes us destroy ourselves and our culture and then they use some parts of our culture as folklore for tourists! They do it now in some events. They lie, they always lie. They are dangerous, but I'm not afraid. They rob our land, our richness and our houses; they are thieves, they are torturers, violent criminals.

Mohamed, 16 years, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

They are also more active in the protests. 71,3% said that they had participated in some kind of demonstration, a sit in or other non-violent form to express their opinions and demands.

Article2: NON DISCRIMINATION

The Moroccans in northern Morocco staged demonstrations against the change of the school schedule and no one even talked to them. And when the Saharawi kids did the same the police beat them - so there is no equality only DISCRIMINATION.

Hayat, 13 years, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara





On the 12th of November 2018, the majority of secondary schools in El Aaiun city witnessed the biggest student protest in decades. The students protested against the change of the school time schedule, as happened also in the north of Morocco.

However, in northern Morocco the students were not attacked, but in El Aaiun the display of dozens of police vehicles and hundreds of anti-riot police agents were deployed and made sieges on the schools, entering the premises and even attacking Saharawi Students

"We protest against changing the school schedules, but we also protest against the occupation,"

Mohamed, 15 years

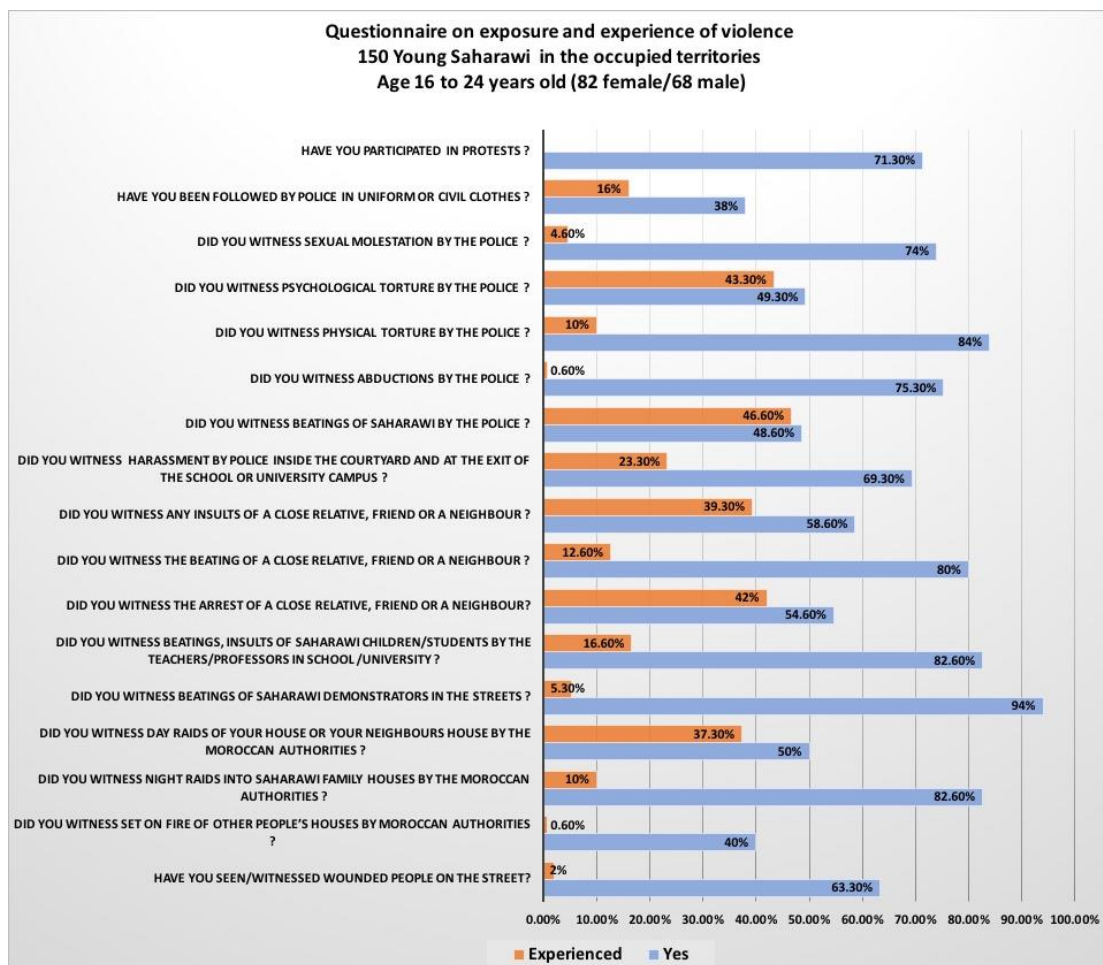


"We are victims of discrimination, we suffer violence every day since our birth - we are fed up! Enough occupation!"

Suelma, 14 years

The violence experienced by this age group is no different than the younger children as can be seen in the chart below. 43,3% were themselves

victims of psychological torture and 10% of physical torture. 48,6% have been beaten by the police and 42% already have been arrested.



In the occupied territories of Western Sahara there are no higher education institutions of any kind except one private school "Université Internationale à Lâayoune". The young people who wish to continue their studies are forced to go to universities and institutes in the Moroccan Kingdom. This forced displacement has from start a bias effect since the families have to gather the economical means to send their children at least 620 kilometres to Agadir, the nearest university, which has a nucleus (extension) in Guelmin with only a few courses. The majority of the

Saharawi university students are therefore in Agadir and Marrakesh. Medicine, physics, chemistry, pharmacy and aeronautics are courses that the Saharawi students are prevented from pursuing, since they are considered key to national security. There is no official ban since the Moroccan Kingdom claims that Saharawi are Moroccan, but obstacles are put in place to prevent Saharawi students from pursuing these careers.

In class, the students suffer discrimination and harassment. On the university campus, the Moroccan



authorities raid their rooms frequently, destroying their belongings.

Saharawi students are organizing groups on each campus to help them with logistical problems and the harassment they suffer from the Moroccan authorities and professors who try by all means to make their studies harder or even impossible. This is a clear apartheid tactic.

It Is very hard to be able to get an apartment. The university dormitories are not safe, but it is very difficult and expensive for us to rent apartments. The owners know that we are Saharawi and hence raise the rent or they won't rent to us at all, since they say that the police are always after us.

Maryam, university student - Marrakesh

In September 2018 a group of female Saharawi students protested several days in front of the university residences, Soussi II. They were demanding their right to be lodged in the dormitories. They covered their faces in fear of future reprisals by teachers and Moroccan students.



The Saharawi student movement also organizes non-violent protests and demonstrations on the different campuses, as well as in the occupied territories, to demand their rights as students and also the right of the Saharawi people to self-determination.

The segregation of the Saharawi students is also evident in the fact that their scholarship is identical to the Moroccan students who study in the cities where they live, while the Saharawi students are themselves forcefully displaced. This represents a completely different economic hardship.

In 2014 to 2015, the different student associations of the "Amazigh" (Moroccan ethnicity), the Moroccan left-wing youth organizations and the



Saharawi student associations had several joint meetings and worked together to achieve improvements in the university life. This cooperation was not seen as positive by the Moroccan authorities, according to different NGOs, and therefore, a manoeuvre was started to bring a wedge between these organizations.

In 2015, a student member of a left-wing youth organization was killed in the University of Fez.

In December 2015, Lazar Yahia, a Saharawi student of Marrakesh university, was brutally attacked with knives and swords by a group of Amazigh students. He had life threatening injuries and had to spend over 20 days in hospital. Racism was the sole reason for this attack.

After this attack the Saharawi students in Marrakesh and Agadir discussed and analysed the situation, and the escalation of racism and harassment against them by Moroccan students.

The group that had injured Lazar Yahia enjoyed impunity and the Moroccan authorities did not move to punish the act nor prevent future attacks. In light of this, the Saharawi students decided to make a non-violent sitting protest on the Marrakesh university

campus on the 23rd January 2016, demanding justice and denouncing the situation.

During the sitting protest several groups of Moroccan students arrived and started a confrontation with the protesters. A fight broke out between the two groups. Among the Moroccan groups was Omar Khalek, a Moroccan, who was not a university student at the time, but who joined the fight with his friends and ended up dead. It is not possible to clarify how he died, nor who the perpetrators were.

In the aftermath, over a dozen Saharawi students and activists were detained in the first trimester of 2016 and the following months.¹⁴

The students denounced that their detention was mainly due to their political beliefs regarding the cause of Western Sahara. They were arrested and suffered torture and ill treatment at the hands of the Moroccan police. In the absence of a serious investigation and a fair trial, as well as the respect for their status as political prisoners, they decided to enter several hunger strikes during their detainment.

The trial of these students was postponed twelve times. The majority were in prison for 501 days without trial, which

¹⁴

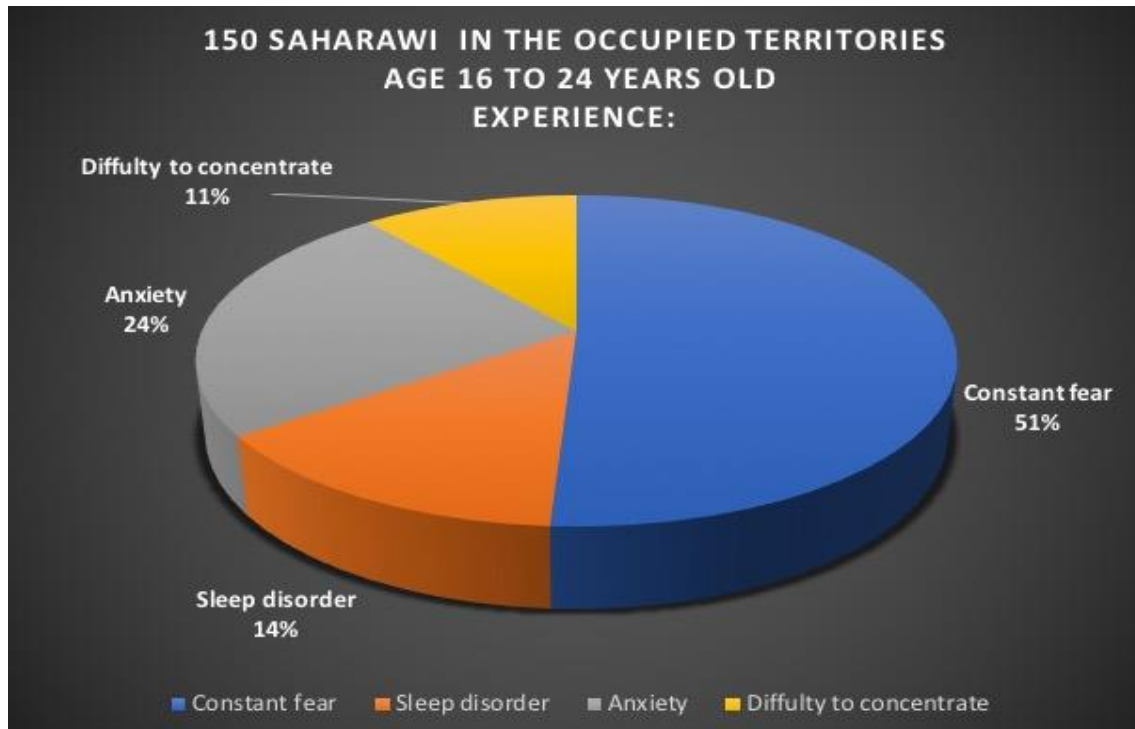
<https://www.scribd.com/document/371833403>

[/Information-Saharawi-Student-prisoners-Group-Companions-of-El-Uali](#)



is far more than allowed by Moroccan law. Eleven of these students were sentenced to three years and four to ten-year prison sentence. Three of them have life threatening health problems derived from torture and the medical neglect they

are suffering. This group of students is known as Companions of El Uali. Anxiety, sleep disorders, constant fear and difficulties concentrating are also reported by this age group.



5-Returning home

The students who return to the occupied territories after completing their university studies have no job opportunities and remain unemployed, since employment is for the Moroccans. The Saharawi unemployment movement has been growing and is organized in all cities. The non-violent protests always have been dismantled by force by the Moroccan authorities. Some examples of these protests were the actions in March and February 2018.



On Friday, 30th of March 2018, the Moroccan authorities detained ten members of a group of young unemployed Saharawi who made a non-violent protest on top of a building, in Smara Avenue in occupied El Aaiun, next to Matala neighbourhood.
(foto: Equipe Media)

The group of unemployed Saharawi, called ELKASAM organized on Monday, March 19, 2018, a peaceful

protest in one of the main avenues of El Aaiun. Half an hour after the protest began, the Moroccan occupation forces took action against the protesters causing various injuries. Two protesters, Nafeaa Elkasimi and Boubakar Bilaamach were seriously injured.

In a symbolic stand, on 19th of February, 2018 the unemployed young Saharawi men placed themselves in a row chained to each other, in front of the employment office in El Aaiun city. The Moroccan occupation forces attacked and violently hit the demonstrators to break their chains.



We want to show, in this way, our resolve to continue demanding our right to employment and against the discrimination we suffer in the occupied territories, where the Moroccan settlers occupy almost all available employment. This is a clear apartheid strategy of the Moroccan Authorities. We are hand in hand, like one body, against the oppression, discrimination and illegal



occupation - we are living proof that the agreements between the European Union and Morocco do not benefit the Saharawi population.

K. 24, unemployed with a university degree, El Aaiun - occupied Western Sahara

Conclusion

Over three generations of Saharawi in the occupied territories have been suffering the traumas of war even in times of cease-fire. Although there is no warfare involving bombing and the engagement of troops against each other due to the cease-fire agreement, all other elements of warfare are present. War crimes¹⁵ like torture, sexual violence, the insertion of settlers, apartheid in its different forms and discrimination, among others, are present and practiced daily by the Moroccan authorities, and spare neither children nor students as documented in this report.

The total absence of any kind of presence of UN mechanisms of protection of the civil population, and the minors in particular, allows the Moroccan Kingdom to continue to commit all kinds of crimes for decades. The not fulfilment of the cease fire basis – the holding of a referendum – postpones and aids the present status quo, which only favours Moroccan occupation. The Saharawi population and its children are defenceless and abandoned.

In this conflict, due to the lack of action, the United Nations is perceived as helping the status quo and the brutal repression suffered by the Saharawi. UNICEF and the International Red Cross are non-existent in the occupied territories. The crimes committed by the Moroccan Kingdom against these children are the responsibility of the international community.

As we have seen in this report, the situation of Saharawi children and youth is unsustainable and cannot have a positive outcome. The level of violence experienced at the hands of the Moroccan authorities and settlers, as well as the complete indifference of the international community, leads these children and youth to deeply distrust and disbelieve in a “peaceful solution”.

The Saharawi children and youth have no doubts about their national identity they see themselves as Saharawi, a people apart and different from the Moroccans, with a different and distinct country. For them, it is clear that Morocco is the “occupier”, “intruder” and “aggressor”.

¹⁵ [https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/336923D8-A6AD-40EC-](https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/336923D8-A6AD-40EC-AD7B-45BF9DE73D56/0/ElementsOfCrimesEng.pdf)

[AD7B-45BF9DE73D56/0/ElementsOfCrimesEng.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/rdonlyres/336923D8-A6AD-40EC-AD7B-45BF9DE73D56/0/ElementsOfCrimesEng.pdf)



It is urgent that MINURSO concludes the aim of its mandate: the realization of the referendum. In the meanwhile, the additional mandate to protect the Saharawi population is essential.