

14 May 2021

## **Western Sahara: Woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya was sexually assaulted**

On 12 May 2021, several masked Moroccan security agents raided the home of woman human rights defender **Sultana Khaya**, and sexually assaulted her and her sister. This was the second raid on her house in 48 hours. On 10 May 2021, several Moroccan plain-clothed security agents raided Sultana Khaya's home in Boujdour, and physically assaulted her. The security agents also detained human rights defender **Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi** and two student activists who were staying in her house. Sultana Khaya has been under de facto house arrest since 19 November 2020.

[Sultana Khaya](#) is a Sahrawi woman human rights defender whose work focuses on women's rights and promoting the right to self-determination for the Sahrawi people. The woman human rights defender is President of the organisation League for the Defense of Human Rights and against Plunder of Natural Resources. Sultana Khaya regularly participates in peaceful demonstrations advocating for the right to self-determination and denouncing violence against Sahrawi women. The woman human rights defender has travelled internationally to participate in conferences and other events relating to the human rights situation in Western Sahara, including at the UN Human Rights Council. [Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi](#) is a Sahrawi human rights defender and the director of the Saharawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA). His work focuses on the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, and on documenting human rights violations in Western Sahara committed by Moroccan security forces.

On 12 May 2021, in the early morning several masked Moroccan security agents raided the house of Sultana Khaya, entering her home through the roof. This was the second raid on Sultana Khaya's house in 48 hours. During the operation, the security agents physically and sexually assaulted Sultana Khaya and her sister. Sultana Khaya was sexually assaulted through several kicks by the Moroccan security agents which caused harm to her genitalia, and her sister was sexually assaulted by the security agents using a stick. The woman human rights defender's brother was also subjected to severe physical abuse causing him to lose consciousness. The security agents also vandalised the house and confiscated the other family members' passports. This raid comes after Sultana Khaya and her sister peacefully protested on the roof of their house with Western Sahara's flags. The security agents spread skunk water all over the home of the woman human rights defender. The Moroccan authorities have cut the house's electricity supply for the last 27 days.

On 10 May 2021, at 5:30 am at least 40 plain-clothes Moroccan security agents raided the home of woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya, forcibly entering through the roof. When they reached Sultana Khaya's bed, the police officers covered her nose and mouth with a rag, which was soaked in a liquid chemical, that made her lose her ability to smell afterwards.

During the raid, the Moroccan security agents also arbitrarily detained human rights defender Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi and two student activists Salek Baber and Khaled Bouvfraya, who were staying in Sultana Khaya's house to show solidarity with her while she is under house arrest. Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi and the student activists were violently detained handcuffed and blindfolded, and spent almost four hours in an unmarked car, where they reported being subjected to severe physical abuse, resulting in several injuries. Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi is suffering from injuries to his back and shoulders from being handcuffed for several hours. The two student activists Salek Baber and Khaled Bouvfraya are also suffering from injuries in different parts of their bodies from being handcuffed for several hours, and as a result of the physical abuse they were subjected to. Human rights defender Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi

and the two student activists Salek Baber and Khaled Bouvfraya were subsequently left by the police in a rural area 60 km from Laayoune city, two hours after arresting them.

According to Sultana Khaya, during the operation on 10 May the security agents also physically assaulted her sister and mother, beating them in the face and threatened her mother that both her daughters would be killed if they did not cease their human rights work. The woman rights defender reported that her sister and her mother were also sexually harassed by the police officers. Additionally, the security agents confiscated several items including the family's mobile phones, laptops, TV, Sultana Khaya's passport, and approximately 1500 Euro. The raid lasted for almost 30 minutes, during which the police officers vandalised several items in the house.

Woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya has been under de facto house arrest since 19 November 2020, with Moroccan security forces maintaining a heavy presence outside her house, during which the woman human rights defender has been subjected to physical and verbal assaults.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the recent raid and sexual assaults carried out by Moroccan security agents against woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya and her sister, and the arbitrary detention and treatment of human rights defender Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi and the two student activists Salek Baber and Khaled Bouvfraya. It also reiterates its concern about the arbitrary house arrest and the ongoing harassment of woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya. Front Line Defenders believes that Sultana Khaya is being targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work.

#### **Front Line Defenders urge the Moroccan authorities to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally remove all restrictions on the free movement of Sultana Khaya and her family, and cease all further forms of surveillance or harassment against them, as it is believed that these measures are solely related to Sultana Khaya's legitimate human rights activities;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the sexual assaults, the physical assaults and threats made by Moroccan security forces against woman human rights defender Sultana Khaya and her sister, and the physical assault against her family, human rights defender Babuizid Muhammed Saaed Labhi and the two student activists Salek Baber and Khaled Bouvfraya, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Allow and provide immediate medical assistance to Sultana Khaya, her sister, other family members and other human rights defenders and activists who suffered as the result of both raids;
4. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Western Sahara and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.