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2010 Human Rights Report: Western Sahara

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices

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Morocco claims the Western Sahara territory and administers Moroccan law through Moroccan institutions in the estimated 85 percent of the territory it controls. However, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (Polisario), an organization that has sought independence for the formerly Spanish territory since 1973, disputes Morocco's claim to sovereignty over the territory. The population of the territory was approximately 491,000, an estimated 100,000 of whom were attributable to Moroccan in-migration. The majority of Western Sahara's population is Sahrawi (literally "people of the desert" in Arabic) Sahrawis also live in the south of internationally recognized Morocco, in Algeria, and in Mauritania.

The Moroccan government sent troops and settlers into the northern two provinces after Spain withdrew in 1975, and extended its administration to the third province after Mauritania renounced its claim in 1979. Moroccan and Polisario forces fought intermittently from 1975 until a 1991 ceasefire and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping contingent, the UN Mission for a Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), whose mandate does not include human rights monitoring. In the late 1980s, Morocco constructed a 1,250-mile stone and sand wall known as the "berm" that marks the effective limit of its administrative control.

In 1988 Morocco and the Polisario agreed to settle the sovereignty dispute by referendum. The parties did not resolve disagreements over voter eligibility and which options for self-determination (integration, independence, or something in between) should be on the ballot; consequently, a referendum never took place.

There have been several attempts to broker a solution. In 2007 the first face-to-face negotiations between representatives of the Moroccan government and the Polisario began under UN auspices. Morocco proposed autonomy for the territory within the kingdom; the Polisario proposed a referendum in which full independence would be an option. After four meetings in 2007 and 2008 produced little progress, both sides participated in informal meetings in August 2009, and during the year from February 10 to 11, from November 8 to 9, and from December 16 to 18 under the auspices of Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary General for Western Sahara, Christopher Ross. Neither the November nor the December meetings yielded significant progress toward a permanent solution to the conflict.

On April 30, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1920, extending MINURSO's mandate until April 30, 2011. The resolution also called on member states to consider voluntary contributions to confidence building measures carried out under the UN High Commissioner for Refugees intended to allow increased contact between family members separated by the dispute.

Morocco considers the part of the territory that it administers to be an integral part of the kingdom with the same laws and structures conditioning the exercise of civil liberties and political rights. Accordingly, ultimate authority rests with King Mohammed VI, and human rights conditions in the territory tended to converge with those in the kingdom.

There were reports that government security officials committed arbitrary or unlawful killings. There were unconfirmed reports of politically motivated disappearances.

On October 10, 173 Saharawis set up approximately 40 tents outside of Laayoune in an area known as Agdem Izik to protest the government's lack of response to poor social and economic conditions in the territory. The camp grew quickly, and by late October, according to most government and credible NGO estimates, as many as 16,000 persons lived in or spent significant time in the camp. On October 21, a delegation led by three regional walis, or regional governors, began negotiations with the organizers of the tent settlement to address the organizers' social and economic concerns, including housing conditions and employment. In order to control the growing number of individuals moving in and out of the community, authorities built a sand wall around the site and placed security checkpoints around the perimeter.

On October 24, security forces shot and killed 14-year-old Al-Nagem Al-Qarhi and injured four other civilians while they were in a car at a checkpoint waiting to enter the Agdem Izik tent camp. In an official statement, the Ministry of the Interior stated that known criminals were riding in the vehicle and that they fired on the gendarmes who had attempted to detain them. An independent investigation, conducted by the domestic NGOs Mediator for Democracy and Human Rights (MDDH), the Forum for an Alternative Morocco, and the Moroccan Observatory for Public Liberties (OMLP), confirmed that a group of men in a 4X4 vehicle attempted to force their way past a Royal Gendarmerie checkpoint. The NGOs noted that gunfire ensued during the incident, but could not identify who fired first. Authorities opened an internal judicial investigation, which they had not concluded at year's end.

After negotiations between Interior Ministry officials and camp organizers failed to result in a peaceful dismantling of the camp, authorities moved on November 8 to dismantle it using water cannons and truncheons. Police and gendarmes dispersed several thousand campers and quickly leveled the camp. When news of the dismantling reached Laayoune, it prompted widespread rioting, violent attacks, and confrontations between security forces and protestors.

The government, international human rights NGOs, and independent domestic NGOs reported that 11 members of the security forces were killed and over 200 injured in violent clashes with Agdem Izik campers or protestors in Laayoune. Two Sahrawis also died in the violence, and some international media sources reported that hundreds of Sahrawis were injured. The government reported that a nonofficial vehicle accidentally struck and fatally injured 26-year-old Babi Gargar Brahim Ould Mahmud Hamadi in Laayoune. His brother and other eyewitnesses told a Human Rights Watch (HRW) investigator that a police vehicle purposefully struck him while he lay injured on the ground.

Another civilian, 42-year-old Brahim Daoudi, died in police custody. The government reported first that he suffered a fatal asthma attack at the Laayoune Military Hospital after security forces detained him. A second official press statement called the cause of death pneumonia. However, Daoudi's family members told Amnesty International (AI) and other NGOs that the government never confirmed the cause or circumstances of his death. At the request of NGOs and the families, the government opened investigations into both civilian deaths; by year's end, it had not concluded either investigation, and authorities had not provided autopsy reports to the family or to the public.

In response to the November 8 events, the parliament, domestic human rights organization Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), and a separate consortium of 11 other domestic human rights NGOs launched investigations. The AMDH and HRW reports, which were available at year's end, confirmed the government's claims that it did not use lethal force during the operation to dismantle Agdem Izik and that there were several casualties among security forces. However, AMDH and HRW also concluded that police and gendarmes used excessive force, including physical beatings to the point of unconsciousness, in suppressing the unrest in Laayoune. The reports also claimed that security forces mistreated detainees who were taken into custody following the violence, and that officials and pro-Moroccan civilians had attacked several Sahrawi homes in Laayoune. The parliament's and the consortium's reports had not been released by year's end.

There were unconfirmed reports of politically motivated disappearances.

On April 28, plainclothes police in Laayoune allegedly abducted Mohamad Abdellah Dayhani. His family reported to the Sahrawi Collective of Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) that Dayhani was last seen near the residence of his relative and Sahrawi independence activist Abdallah Dayhani. His family allegedly inquired about his whereabouts at the police station and received no information. Government authorities claimed that although Dayhani's mother appeared at a police station to inquire into the whereabouts of her son, she never returned with the information that authorities requested she provide to launch an investigation.

Regarding the 2007 discovery of a gravesite near the Laayoune Prison, the government stated that judicial police who inspected the gravesite with the assistance of French forensics experts found human remains that appeared to date to 1938. There were no further developments.

Regarding the still-unresolved cases of disappearance dating to the 1970s and 1980s, the governmental Consultative Council for Human Rights (CCDH) continues to cooperate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to investigate claims of enforced and involuntary disappearances. The CCDH has provided the OHCHR with information regarding 56 cases that the OHCHR considers unresolved. CCDH and UNCHR continued to receive occasional new claims regarding disappearances that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. The CCDH acknowledged that due to a lack of evidence, it will likely be unable to resolve nine difficult cases. Sahrawi human rights groups and families, on the other hand, claimed that at least 114 cases remained unresolved and accused the CCDH and its predecessor, the Justice and Reconciliation Authority (IER), of failing to acknowledge many additional alleged disappearances, especially from Western Sahara.

As it has done since 2000, the CCDH paid reparations during the year to victims of human rights abuses, including Sahrawis or family members of those Sahrawis who had disappeared or been detained during the 1970s and 1980s. During the year 331 individuals received reparation payments totaling 46,233,210 dirhams (\$550,395). The CCDH reported that although it continued to receive and investigate reparation claims during the year, it had shifted its focus to community reparation projects, including providing medical insurance to victims' families. During the year CCDH disbursed 979 medical insurance cards to individuals living in both Morocco and in Western Sahara.

There were credible reports that security forces engaged in torture, beatings, and other mistreatment of detainees. HRW, AI, and local NGOs continued to report abuses, especially of Sahrawi independence advocates.

Moroccan authorities detained more than 300 civilians during the November 8 dismantling of the Adgem Izik camp and the subsequent violence in Laayoune. Authorities released without charge more than 100 individuals within 48 hours, but by year's end, the government had charged at least 60 with crimes. By year's end, the government claimed that nearly all detainees had been arraigned before a civilian court and that 47 remained in custody at the Laayoune Prison awaiting

trial. Authorities reported that they had arraigned and transferred 20 additional detainees to the Salé Prison in internationally recognized Morocco, where they were awaiting trial before a military tribunal at year's end. However, NGOs alleged that the government continued to hold as many as 131 detainees in either Salé or Laayoune and had not filed formal charges against some of them by year's end.

Many of those released and many of the families of those still in custody claimed that security officials beat and otherwise abused them. International and domestic NGOs claimed that security forces beat some civilians to the extent that they sustained fractured limbs, open wounds, and loss of consciousness. NGOs and family members also claimed that the security forces used rubber bullets during the riots in Laayoune, although the government denied this charge. AI reported that, in two cases, victims alleged that police raped them while in custody. In addition AI, the Association of Sahrawi Victims of Grave Human Rights Violations (ASVDH), and other domestic NGOs alleged that, in numerous instances, security officials threatened detainees with rape.

In the ensuing protests and riots that occurred after the dismantlement of the camp on November 8, numerous eyewitnesses reported that police beat and used excessive force to detain protestors and bystanders. Police briefly detained and beat with fists and rubber batons an American journalist and a Sahrawi employee of HRW, who watched as police indiscriminately beat several other Sahrawis who had gathered in the area. Police took the two to a temporary holding station on the periphery of a city square and released them without charge.

Regarding the February 2009 case of a Sahrawi independence activist who claimed that police had beaten and sodomized her, the Ministry of Justice rejected the case for lack of evidence after judicial police investigated. Western Sahara-based human rights NGOs criticized the decision and the lack of transparency in the investigation.

The Procurer General also rejected for lack of evidence a well known human rights activist's August 2009 claim that police stripped her, left her naked on the outskirts of Laayoune, and threatened to post videos of her on the Internet. The government confirmed that the victim had submitted a complaint to the Public Prosecutor in Laayoune in September 2009 and that the public prosecutor had investigated the accusation. Western Sahara-based human rights NGOs criticized the decision and the investigation.

Authorities confirmed in November that the General Prosecutor at the Court of Appeals in Laayoune received a complaint from 20-year-old Chamad Marzouk, who alleged that two police officers beat him while he was in custody in September 2009. Authorities conducted an investigation, but the Attorney General ruled that Marzouk's allegations were unfounded due to a lack of evidence, including medical documentation or eyewitnesses.

Sahrawi activist Yahya Mohamed El Hafed, convicted by a judge along with seven others of killing a security officer in 2008, remained in prison. The group claimed that the court convicted them based on confessions elicited through torture. The government reported that it had released one of the convicted, Omar El Faquir, in 2008. There were no other developments in the case.

There were several cases of violence breaking out at rallies or demonstrations between pro-independence Sahrawi groups and pro-union activists. In all these cases, the government reported security forces responded adequately to prevent violence from becoming serious, although Sahrawi activists alleged that the security forces responded slowly and sometimes even tacitly encouraged violence.

On April 6, a group of 11 Sahrawi independence activists returned to Laayoune after having traveled to Algiers and the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, to meet with Algerian and Polisario officials. When various groups gathered at the airport to greet the activists, 31 nationalist Sahrawi associations clashed with several groups of pro-union activists. Independence activists claimed that plainclothes police encouraged pro-union demonstrators to attack them and

deliberately delayed action to prevent the violence. While no one was seriously injured, crowds damaged the vehicles. The government claimed that security forces acted professionally and prevented greater violence.

On April 8, police stopped independence activists Sultana Khaya and others who had returned from Algiers on April 6 at a standard police checkpoint in Boujdour. The activists reported that a large group of pro-union activists had gathered at the checkpoint to await the group. While independence activists report that the pro-union group attacked first, pro-union activists allege that the independence activists provoked the ensuing violence. CODESA claimed that three individuals were injured. Authorities reported the scuffle and claim they maintained order.

On May 7, ASVDH claimed that security forces intervened during a pro-independence Sahrawi demonstration in the Ma'atalah neighborhood of Laayoune, resulting in injuries to Dagna Moussaoui and her two sons, Jamal and Alyen Housaini. Authorities confirmed that a group of activists held a protest near a school where one police officer on a routine patrol dispersed the students, but claimed that their intervention was nonviolent.

On July 18, several pro-independence activists gathered to welcome activists who had recently visited Algiers and Tindouf. The reception took place in the Al'Ina'ach neighborhood of Laayoune, which was reportedly surrounded by dozens of police cars and plainclothes security authorities. ASVDH reported that police verbally intimidated gatherers and attacked several individuals including Mohamed Manolo Hassan Dah, Khadjatou Lma'adal, Mary Salek Boudjemaa, and Kalthoum Lbsair.

Police impunity remained a problem. According to several international, domestic, and Sahrawi NGOs, the number of alleged victims of human rights abuses to file complaints against police increased. The government disputed the alleged increase and provided statistics indicating that through October, residents of Western Sahara filed 45 complaints against authorities based throughout the territory. Authorities referred all 45 complaints to the judicial police for investigation. The Public Prosecutor opened investigations into all 45 complaints but dismissed 32 due to lack of evidence. Thirteen cases remain under investigation. International and domestic human rights organizations claimed that authorities dismissed nearly all complaints without collecting evidence beyond the police version of events.

The government stated that it increased investigations, prosecutions, and training (including a human rights component) to security personnel and took some steps aimed at reducing police abuse and impunity. The government reported that some of these prosecutions involved officers who committed crimes in the territory; however, the exact number was uncertain because the government did not disaggregate any of the data by region. Past practice has often left alleged abusers in leadership positions or transferred them to other positions.

Allegations of abuse and substandard prison conditions persisted. Government policy permits NGOs that provide social or religious services to prisoners to enter prison facilities, but does not permit NGOs that solely have a human rights mission to enter except when authorities authorize them to do so. The Moroccan Observatory of Prisons (OMP), a government-subsidized local NGO consisting of lawyers and benevolent activists promoting better conditions for prisoners, and members of the CCDH continued regular visits to prisons and child protection centers, which host juvenile offenders, and relayed complaints of substandard prison conditions or detainee abuse to government authorities.

In October OMP stated that overcrowding in the Laayoune Prison, the sole prison in Western Sahara, was no longer as serious a problem as in past years, and conditions had improved significantly. The prison had an initial capacity of 300. OMP reported in October that authorities had reduced the prison population from a high of 900 inmates in 2005 to 448 through a program that transferred prisoners to other facilities in internationally recognized Morocco. Of the remaining 448 prisoners, there were 39 women and 31 teenagers, all of whom were separated from the men while in detention. However, overcrowding increased when authorities imprisoned up to 300 Sahrawis in connection with the Agdem Izik camp dismantling in November. Authorities held the majority of these prisoners for one to four days, then released them without

charge, and government and NGO reports indicated that between 47 and 111 Sahrawis detained in connection with the November 8 events remained in the Laayoune Prison, bringing the population at year's end to between 495 and 559. Human rights activists and NGOs continued to charge that the government occasionally used its program to reduce overcrowding as a punishment for politically active prisoners by transferring them to facilities in Morocco far from their families. The government and OMP acknowledged that transfers occurred, but stated that their purpose was apolitical and solely to improve prison conditions.

In addition to the main Laayoune Prison, there are small holding cells in Smara, Boujdour, and Dakhla, which can hold approximately 20 prisoners each. Overcrowding at these facilities was generally not a problem.

Human rights and pro-independence activists continued to claim that authorities arrested them for their political activities but charged them with drug or other criminal offenses. Laws require authorities to investigate abuse allegations for any individual facing prosecution who requests an investigation, but local and international human rights advocates claimed that courts often refused to order medical examinations, or to consider medical examination results in cases of alleged torture.

In September the government reported that the public prosecutor and magistrates had requested expert medical examinations for 31 individuals, compared with 27 requests in 2009 and 49 requests in 2008. An 11-member coalition of Moroccan NGOs reported that 52 Sahrawis arrested by security forces in connection with the November 8 camp dismantlement and ensuing protests alleged police torture and submitted requests for medical examinations. The government's response to their requests was unknown at year's end.

The government stated that by law and in accordance with official policy, there are no political prisoners in Morocco or Western Sahara, and all detainees had been convicted of or charged with crimes. However, human rights and pro-independence groups alleged that there were approximately 52 Sahrawi "political prisoners" held either in Western Sahara or in prisons in internationally recognized Morocco. OMP noted that, at year's end, all known Sahrawi political activist prisoners were in detention facilities in Tiznit, Kenitra, Ben Slimane, Agadir, Taraghazout, Casablanca, and Salé.

Students who made public displays of their support for Western Saharan independence were reportedly detained and mistreated. Student and human rights activists stated that authorities regularly took them into custody, beat them, and released them within 24 hours without formal arrest or charge.

In September 2009 according to local NGOs, police allegedly threw demonstrator Mohamed Berkan from a window in Laayoune during an unauthorized demonstration. The Public Prosecutor officially refuted the NGOs' allegation and charged Berkan with assaulting an officer and other crimes. Berkan paid a 200 dirham (\$25) fine, and authorities released him on September 27 after he completed his full one-year sentence.

Law prohibits questioning the institution of the monarchy, Islam as the state religion, and Morocco's claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara (see country report on Morocco). The king announced, in a November 2009 speech, a policy of decreased tolerance for individuals who hold pro-independence views. As a result, individuals and the media engaged in self-censorship, and no views appeared in the media during the year supporting either independence or a referendum that included independence as an option.

Authorities barred Moroccan and international journalists from travelling to Laayoune in the days preceding and subsequent to the November 8 camp dismantlement, making it difficult for the public to obtain and verify information regarding injury and death tolls. There were no reports of government action against Web log writers in the territory. During the year there continued to be credible reports that government authorities prevented some foreign journalists from meeting with pro-independence activists.

Moroccan and international media, as well as satellite television, were available in the territory. There was no indication that Internet access in the territory differed from that in internationally recognized Morocco, which was generally open and unrestricted, although the government blocked a small number of Morocco-based Web sites and proxies used to make activity on the Internet untraceable.

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association within the limits provided by law. Although sit-ins, demonstrations, and protests occurred, in practice the government used administrative delays and other methods to suppress or discourage demonstrations. The government also prohibited or failed to recognize associations it deemed unqualified for NGO status.

The Ministry of the Interior required persons wishing to hold public gatherings, including demonstrations, to obtain permission for public assemblies. However, authorities often allowed those who have not received permission to hold assemblies on an unofficial basis. NGOs have complained that the process is never consistent.

The constitution and the law provide for freedom of association. Specifically, a 1958 decree, Dahir 1-58-376, article 5 governs the establishment and functioning of establishments.

Pro-independence organizations and some human rights NGOs stated that in recent years they have applied less frequently for legal permits to engage in sit-ins and demonstrations because police rarely granted the permits. In addition to these limitations, the organizations reported that holding organized demonstrations became more difficult because police increasingly harassed them following the king's November 2009 speech. The government reported that as of October, (the last date for which figures are available) over 130 demonstrations or protests had been held in Western Sahara. The majority of these regarded socioeconomic issues such as unemployment and housing concerns, but many also had political overtones.

The government enforced strict procedures governing the ability of NGOs and activists to meet with journalists. Foreign journalists needed prior official approval before meeting with pro-independence NGOs.

As in previous years, the government did not allow CODESA or ASVDH to register as official NGOs, limiting their ability to raise funds domestically and internationally and to secure space for public meetings. CODESA last submitted an application in 2008 by registered mail. ASVDH leadership reported that in 2005, an Agadir administrative court ordered the government to register it; however, the government did not do so.

The government continued to accuse the Polisario of withholding information regarding 213 Moroccans alleged to be missing since the 1975-91 war, and the Polisario continued to accuse Morocco of withholding information concerning approximately 150 Algerians and Polisario supporters (including 58 soldiers). Morocco and the Polisario both denied that any former combatants remained in detention.

Corruption among security forces and judicial officials was a problem.

The laws and restrictions regarding religious organizations and religious freedom in the territory are the same as those in Morocco. For a complete description of religious freedom, please see the *2010 International Religious Freedom Report* at www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/rpt.

HRW and ASVDH reported instances of authorities preventing foreign persons from meeting with pro-independence activists.

Sahrawi independence activists alleged that on August 28, plainclothes security forces beat and arrested 14 Spanish activists protesting human rights violations in Western Sahara in front of the Hotel Negjir. ASVDH reported that authorities

expelled the Spanish activists to the Canary Islands after hours of interrogation. Moroccan authorities claimed that police only intervened to prevent and manage a brawl that resulted when Moroccan youth leaving a soccer match came across the Spanish activists. In an August 30 statement, the Spanish Foreign Ministry confirmed that the Moroccan police had detained 11 Spaniards and accepted Morocco's explanation that the police had intervened with the aim of defusing clashes between demonstrators and Moroccan citizens.

Although in previous years, the government occasionally restricted freedom to travel abroad, there were no reports that the government restricted freedom to travel abroad during the year.

In an October 2009 case, authorities detained and charged seven Sahrawi activists with "intelligence cooperation with a foreign entity" and incitement to disturb public order after they traveled to meet with Algerian and Polisario officials in Algiers and Tindouf. Government officials sent the case to a military tribunal in accordance with a law that gives military courts jurisdiction over cases involving treason or espionage. On January 28, the prison administration provisionally released one of the activists, Dakja Lashgar, due to health problems, but the government did not drop official charges against her. After the remaining six activists engaged in a 41-day hunger strike, a separate civilian court in Sale ordered the provisional release of Yahdith Ettarouzi, Rachid Sghir, and Saleh Labihi on May 18, but also did not drop charges against them. On September 23, the military court in Sale dismissed the espionage charges against the seven and referred the case to the Casablanca civil appeals court for a hearing on the remaining charge of incitement. The remaining imprisoned activists, Ahmed Alansari, Brahim Dahane, and Ali Salem Tamek, appeared four times before the Casablanca court, but the judge postponed the case each time because pro-Moroccan activists in the courtroom caused chaos and physically threatened the three defendants. Numerous credible Sahrawi and Moroccan human rights NGOs claimed that authorities permitted the scenes of chaos inside the courtroom as a means of intimidating the detainees and any witnesses or family members who might have wished to attend. They also continued to maintain that the charges against the seven were politically motivated. The detainees' families reported that while their access to the detainees was limited during the first month of the activists' detention, the government generally allowed them access thereafter.

CODESA leader Aminatou Haidar, whom authorities prevented from reentering the territory for 34 days in November and December 2009, returned on December 18, 2009. Since her return, Haidar has travelled freely in and out of the territory.

Since 1977 the inhabitants of the Western Saharan provinces of Laayoune, Smara, Awsard, and Boujdour and, since 1983, Oued Ed-Dahab, have participated in Moroccan national and regional elections. In the June 2009 communal elections, the government allowed only Sahrawis with pro-Moroccan political views to serve as candidates. Turnout exceeded 70 percent of registered voters. Domestic observers leveled accusations of corruption, principally vote buying, in some races.

Relatively little information was available on discrimination in the territory. In traditional tribal Sahrawi society, women participated more actively in political and economic activities than among other North African ethnic groups. Most Sahrawis in the territory lived in urban or semi-urban environments, and their circumstances paralleled the situation in Morocco proper. In the June 2009 communal elections, women won 13 percent of seats due partly to the implementation of the same new quota system used in internationally recognized Morocco, which required all political parties to include at least 12 percent women on their party slates.

For information on trafficking in persons, please see the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at www.state.gov/g/tip.

The Moroccan labor code applies in the Moroccan-controlled areas of the territory. Moroccan unions covering all sectors were present in those areas but were not active. The largest trade confederations maintain a nominal presence in

Laayoune and Dakhla. These include the Moroccan Union of Labor, the Democratic Confederation of Labor, and the National Union of Moroccan Workers.

The constitution and the labor code permit the right to strike, but there were no known labor strikes, other job actions, or collective bargaining agreements during the year. Most union members were employees of the Moroccan government or state-owned organizations. Unions were also active in the phosphate and fishing industries. Wage-sector workers in the territory earned up to 85 percent more than their counterparts in Morocco as an inducement for Moroccans to relocate to the territory. The government exempted workers from income and value-added taxes.

The labor code prohibited forced or bonded labor, and there were no reports that such practices occurred. Penalties for those who perpetrate forced labor range up to four years' imprisonment, and penalties for forced child labor are between one and three years in prison. Labor inspectors assigned to labor delegation offices enforce Moroccan labor laws. There are two delegations in Western Sahara, one in Laayoune and one in Oued Eddahab.

Regulations on the minimum age of employment were the same as in Morocco. There were no reports regarding child labor in the formal wage sector. There were reports of children working in family-owned businesses and in the agricultural sector.

The minimum wage and maximum hours of work in the territory were identical to those in Morocco. In practice during peak periods, workers in fish processing plants worked as many as 12 hours per day, six days per week. Occupational health and safety standards were the same as in Morocco and enforcement was rudimentary, except for a prohibition on the employment of women in dangerous occupations.

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