

# Western Sahara: The United Nations calls on Morocco to release Sahrawi prisoners

"Morocco should release the prisoners of the Gdeim Izik group": this is the call made by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (UNWGAD). In an opinion dated 11 October, this panel concluded that the detention of several Sahrawi activists for 13 years in Moroccan prisons is unlawful.

Published:04/12/2023 - 14:45 2 minutes



Photo from November 9, 2010, during the dismantling of the Gdeim Izik camp, near Laayoune, in Western Sahara, by Moroccan security forces, where hundreds of people were arrested. REUTERS/Handout/MAP

And: RFI

This is a "huge victory" for Western Sahara lawyers and freedom activists, who are now calling on the French authorities to work to secure their release. The United Nations called on Morocco, in a letter written on October 11, to release the Sahrawi protesters, members of a group called Gdeim Izik, who were found guilty of killing security forces soldiers when Moroccan courts dismantled the Gdeim Izik camp in 2013, and closed since then.

This opinion from the United Nations Working Group on arbitrary detention is welcomed by Régine Villemont, leader of the party of solidarity and political support for Polisario (AARASD). "It is something that started in October and that took a little time to get out of the pipeline of the Working Group, but it is true that it is important, because it is still a position that is taken clearly and strongly on the part of the Working Group, from Geneva and the Human Rights Council, in a way, to clearly inform Morocco that these Gdeim Izik prisoners were arrested under unusual circumstances and were tortured to confess to crimes they did not commit," said Régine.

"For the first time there was a trial in a military court, and an appeal, and all of this in a state of non-compliance with the normal rules of detention for these 24 people. Moreover, they were sentenced in 2013 to very heavy prison terms, imprisonment of life in prison, 25 years, 30 years... It's almost a lifetime," added Régine Villemont.

24 accused Sahrawis were sentenced to life imprisonment. Already at that time, human rights defenders were shouting about the political trial of Sahrawi activists. By the end of 2022, a coalition of organizations and lawyers had submitted six torture complaints against Morocco to the United Nations Committee against Torture, on behalf of six prisoners.