

19 March 2020

Western Sahara: Enforced disappearance of human rights defender El-Khatat Babit

On 12 March 2020, Sahrawi human rights defender **El-Khatat Babit** was violently detained by the Moroccan army during a peaceful demonstration in the demilitarised border village of Guerguerat. His current whereabouts remain unknown.

[El-Khatat Babit](#) is a Sahrawi human rights defender and member of the Sahrawi Association for Human Rights. His work focuses on the rights of Sahrawi political prisoners, and the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination. He regularly participates in peaceful demonstrations in Guerguerat.

On 12 March 2020, El-Khatat Babit was detained and taken to an unknown location by the Moroccan army during a peaceful demonstration in the village of Guerguerat. As the village is demilitarised, the presence of the Moroccan army there was illegal. While being detained, El-Khatat Babit was physically abused which caused him severe injuries. The human rights defender was seen while being transferred to the Dakhla hospital under heavy military escort. His family and friends have not been allowed to contact him. His current whereabouts remain unknown.

Human rights defenders in Western Sahara have been frequently harassed by the Moroccan authorities in reprisal for their peaceful human rights activities. El-Khatat Babit has received several death threats and has been subjected to a smear campaign in the past.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the enforced disappearance of El-Khatat Babit, which it believes is directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate human rights activities and his exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. El-Khatat Babit's enforced disappearance also raises serious concerns over his treatment, along with the conditions in which he is being kept.

Front Line Defenders urges the Moroccan authorities to:

1. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the enforced disappearance and physical abuse of human rights defender El-Khatat Babit, with a view to ensuring his protection and release alive, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
2. Inform the family and lawyer of El-Khatat Babit of his whereabouts, and allow them immediate and unfettered access to him;
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.