



Sultana Khaya, protesting her de facto house arrest on her roof, December 7, 2021.

SULTANA KHAYA TELLS UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ABOUT REPEATED RAPES WHILE UNDER DE FACTO HOUSE ARREST

WASHINGTON, D.C. and BOUJDOUR, WESTERN SAHARA – On December 23, 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders, Mary Lawlor, [published](#) an [online public statement](#) detailing information received from Sultana Khaya, a Sahrawi human rights defender who has been wrongly held under *de facto* house arrest since November 19, 2020.

Sultana [described her experience](#) under *de facto* house arrest to Ms. Lawlor, including instances when Moroccan government agents [raped](#) and [gagged](#) her and [forcibly injected](#) her with unknown substances. Ms. Lawlor [explained](#), “Sultana Khaya told me she has been forcibly held under house arrest for over a year, unable to leave, or to have any other family, or anyone else – including medics – visit her, even when she is sick.” Ms. Lawlor continued, “[Sultana] told me how, after her arrest in November 2020, she has been held in her family’s house, with dozens of security officers guarding the doors, day and night.”

In prior meetings with her international legal team, including Stephanie Herrmann, Jared Genser, Mads Andenas, and Tone Sørfoonn Moe, Sultana explained the egregious human rights violations that she and her family endure. Moroccan forces regularly raid the Khaya home at night and torture, rape, and brutalize the Khaya family. “We dare not sleep in fear of what might happen when darkness comes,” Sultana said. “It’s like a routine for them. Whenever they come, they [rape](#) us. It makes them feel high, and they obviously feel proud about doing it.”

Sultana and her sister, Luara, have a [petition](#) pending before the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and an [urgent appeal](#) before the UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture, Human Rights Defenders, and Violence Against Women.

Nevertheless, Sultana remains committed to the causes of women’s rights and a referendum on

self-determination in Western Sahara. She implores, “I am not the first Sahrawi woman to be raped by the occupiers. I am simply the first woman to speak publicly about it. I have to expose the reality of the occupation. And I need to pave the way for the next generation of Sahrawi women.”

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Statement by UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders Mary Lawlor

Sahrawi WHRD Reports Violent Attacks Under House Arrest

23 December 2021

Sahrawi Woman Human Rights Defender Sultana Khaya told me she has been forcibly held under house arrest for over a year, unable to leave, or to have any other family, or anyone else – including medics – visit her, even when she is sick.

She told me how, after her arrest in November 2020, she has been held in her family’s house, with dozens of security officers guarding the doors, day and night, that her sister and her elderly mother are with her, and only her mother is allowed to leave to get food.

Sultana said she has not been charged with any crime, and that she would welcome a chance to respond to whatever allegations are against her. In June 2021 I joined with other UN independent experts in raising her treatment with the Moroccan authorities, noting that Sultana has been a prominent Woman Human Rights Defender for many years.

A 2007 attack on her resulted in her losing an eye, and she has been subjected to various attacks as a result of her human rights work. Now she is held in indefinite detention in harsh conditions. Her house has been stripped all virtually all furniture and appliances, and she and her mother and sister all sleep in the same small room.

She told me that in recent months masked security agents have repeatedly raided the house during the night, tying her hands, blindfolding her and gagging her. She said during these raids she and her sister have been attacked, and that she has been raped. She named those who she said are the perpetrators, and is in constant fear of more attacks.

She also described how, during two of these raids, the attackers injected her with unknown substances, and that they have also thrown toxic liquids into the house, stripping the walls of paint and affecting her health. She says the poison has made her hair fall out and her teeth

brittle.

Sultana appears to be in serious danger, in declining health and vulnerable to further attacks. She has been held like this for 400 days.

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