

November 17, 2021
MEDIA RELEASE

**INTERNATIONAL LEGAL TEAM FOR SULTANA KHAYA FILES URGENT APPEAL
WITH UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS ON TORTURE, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS,
AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Washington, D.C. and Boujdour, Western Sahara — This week, the international legal team for Sahrawi activists and political prisoners Sultana and Luara Khaya filed an [urgent appeal](#) with the UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture, Human Rights Defenders, and Violence Against Women, imploring them to condemn the violence that the Moroccan government has perpetrated against Sultana and Luara Khaya. The international legal team previously submitted Sultana and Luara Khaya's [petition](#) to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on July 29, 2021.

It has been *one year* since Moroccan security forces first surrounded Sultana and Luara Khaya's home and forcibly detained them without any legal justification, and since then, they have endured illegal and violent raids, rape, physical and sexual assault, denial of medical treatment, exposure to COVID-19, and toxic substances being thrown into their home – among a litany of other abuses. [CNN Global](#) previously published an op-ed by Sultana describing these unspeakable injustices.

Most recently, on November 15, 2021, Moroccan agents raped Sultana and subjected Luara to sexual assault. At approximately 5:40 am local time, agents entered the Khaya sisters' home through the roof. They ran downstairs and opened the door for additional agents to enter, bringing the total number of agents to between 50 and 60.

The agents zip-tied each sister's wrists together. Then, three agents held down each sister by pressing their knees into Sultana's and Luara's necks and shoulders. The agents forcibly removed Sultana's pants and used their fingers to penetrate her intimate areas. Other agents grabbed Luara's breasts and intimate areas over her clothes. As Sultana and Luara screamed in pain, the agents covered their mouths. Sultana could barely breathe and panicked, thinking that she would suffocate. At around 6:00 am, the agents left the house.

Last week, on November 8, 2021, Moroccan security agents invaded the Khaya home, physically and sexually tortured Sultana, Luara, and their eighty-four-year-old mother, poisoned the family's water supply, and ransacked their food. Sultana was held down and injected against her will with an unknown substance that made her sick. The agents, ignoring Sultana's screams of pain, said, "now you will not protest."

Despite this abuse, Sultana continues to peacefully protest by waving the flag of Western Sahara from her rooftop every day. Jared Genser, International *Pro Bono* Counsel to the Khaya sisters, said, "Sultana is extremely brave and a global symbol for peaceful resistance – but her persistence neither undercuts the severity of the violence against her, nor the importance of protecting her from further violence. On the contrary, it only increases the international community's duty to take urgent and decisive action."

The Khaya sisters have received broad international recognition for the [abuses](#) they have endured at the hands of the Moroccan government. The UN has [repeatedly recognized](#) that Sultana is under *de facto* house arrest. Stephanie Herrmann, lead human rights lawyer on the Khaya sisters' international legal team, stated, "The urgent appeal is a critical step towards elevating the Khaya sisters' case and calls for protection. We hope to draw from the UN swift condemnation of Morocco's actions and greater international efforts to protect Sultana and Luara."

The Special Rapporteurs are part of the UN's Commission on Human Rights and report to it on specific issues. For instance, when the body receives credible evidence of an individual being tortured it has a mandate to take action to urge the government to ensure physical and mental integrity of the person. The Special Rapporteur on Torture can also conduct fact-finding country visits and submit reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly.

In submitting the urgent appeal, "we are reminding Sultana and Luara that they are not alone. We stand with them in their struggle for justice and release from arbitrary detention," said Tone Sorfonn Moe, a member of the international legal team.

Sultana and her legal team hope that this urgent appeal will be a catalyst for their safety and release. "I fear for my life and for the safety of my family," Sultana said. "We need protection. We are all alone."

The international community must answer Sultana's call for aid. "UN bodies have made numerous findings against Morocco and appeals also in Sultana Khaya's case," says Professor Mads Andenas QC, the former UN Chair-Rapporteur for Arbitrary Detention and a member of the Khaya sisters' international legal team. "It is extremely important that the UN follow up as the violations against her and Luara are increasingly grave. Failure to speak out against injustice provides a license for Morocco to act with total impunity."