

For Immediate Release

Statement Regarding Sahrawi Women Held in Tindouf Refugee Camp

On May 19, 2016 in Madrid, Human Rights Watch issued the following statement on the occasion of a news conference organized by supporters of the Sahrawi women whose families in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria are preventing them from returning to Spain.

Human Rights Watch is concerned about the restrictions on the rights of Sahrawi women in the refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria, to return to Spain, where they live.

There are presently at least two adult women in the camps whose families have detained them against their will without effective intervention by the Polisario Front, the effective governing authority in the camps. They are Darya Embarek Selma, 26, and Nadjiba Mohamed Kacem, 24. A third woman, Maloma Morales de Matos (or Maaluma Takya Hamda, according to her birth certificate), 22, has been prevented by her family from publicly declaring whether she wishes to remain there or return to Spain, where she has citizenship.

As adults, they have the right to decide freely whether they wish to remain with their family members in the Sahrawi refugee camps or leave. Their right to freedom of movement does not depend on their nationality, but is a right enjoyed by everyone.

The three women first came to Spain as children participating in summer programs for Sahrawi refugees, sponsored by host families, and have since made their homes in Spain. Darya Embarek Selma and Nadjiba Mohamed Kacem returned to the camps in December 2013 and January 2014 respectively to visit their biological families. For more than two years, they have made clear that their families have been preventing them from returning to Spain, where they are, or were, legal residents.

Maloma Morales, meanwhile, has been with her family since arriving in the camps in December 2015 for what was planned as a one-week visit. The family has declared that she is Sahrawi and not Spanish, and has posted a video online purporting to show her happy in their company. She has not been seen or heard from except in this video.

On March 5, 2016, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a visit to the refugee camps, raised these three cases with Polisario Secretary-General Mohamed Abdelaziz, who [promised](#) to “pay special attention to resolving” them. Human Rights Watch issued a [statement](#) about their plight on March 4.

A fourth woman with Spanish residency, Koria Badbad Hafed, returned to the refugee camps to visit her family in 2011. Her Spanish host family says that it has not heard from her since. Holding an adult against their will is illegal confinement, whether or not the captors are relatives.

The Polisario Front should ensure that Ms. Morales, Ms. Mohamed, Ms. Embarek, and every other woman over whom they exercise administrative authority can exercise their right to freedom of movement, and treat as crimes past and future acts of illegal confinement.

The Polisario Front should also investigate the whereabouts of Ms Badbad Hafed and, if it locates her in the area it administers, ensure in a verifiable manner that she is able to exercise her right to choose whether to remain or leave.

The Polisario has highlighted the prominent role that women play in Sahrawi society and in advancing the national cause. It needs to demonstrate similar zeal in protecting the rights of individual women to exercise their freedom of movement.