

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 10, 2010

The President
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

We write to call your immediate attention to the increasingly violent and tragic situation unfolding in the occupied territory of Western Sahara – the last colony in Africa -- where thousands of Sahrawi people are in imminent danger. As the talks resumed this week at the United Nations between the Moroccans and the Polisario, we are very concerned by recent reports of violence targeting innocent Sahrawis by Moroccan security forces in Laayoune and respectfully request your Administration to urge Morocco to end the violence.

Last month a 14 year-old Sahrawi boy was killed by Moroccan security forces as his vehicle entered a protest camp outside the city of Laayoune in the occupied territory of Western Sahara. The young man was attempting to join thousands of Sahrawi people in a protest to demand better housing, jobs and other improvements for Western Sahara, which Morocco illegally annexed after Spain withdrew in 1975. The Associated Press is reporting that Morocco is preventing international humanitarian organizations and journalists from entering the protest camp to report on the situation and assess the needs of the protesters. This week, Reuters and other news sources are reporting that the Moroccan security forces have violently dismantled the protest camp and the Polisario and Moroccan government are both claiming casualties.

Morocco has a long record of repressing the rights of the Sahrawi people to freedom of expression, association and assembly in the occupied territory. A 2008 Human Rights Watch investigation concluded that the Moroccan government bans peaceful demonstrations and refuses legal recognition to human rights organizations. The investigation also noted that Moroccan security forces arbitrarily arrest, beat and torture demonstrators and suspected Sahrawi activists. According to Amnesty International, Sahrawi human rights activists also face politically-motivated criminal charges, restrictions on movement and administrative obstruction to prevent their organizations' legal registration. This current situation further demonstrates that a human rights monitoring component must be added to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) mandate.

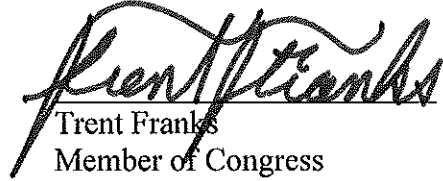
We urge you to call upon the Kingdom of Morocco to show restraint and respect for the Sahrawis' right to freedom of expression, and to end the violence against

Sahrawis. The United States should also work with the international community to ensure that the protestors are provided adequate security and humanitarian assistance. Your immediate intervention is necessary to help quell this tragic situation.

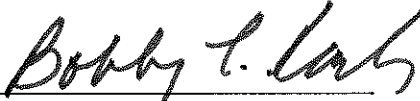
Sincerely,



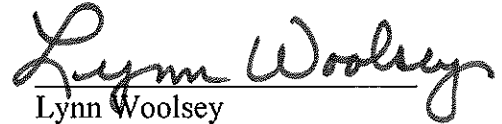
Donald M. Payne
Member of Congress



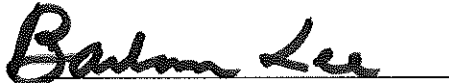
Trent Franks
Member of Congress



Bobby Rush
Member of Congress



Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress