

Morocco: Protect And Preserve Mass Grave Sites

Contributed by DI Monitoring & Investigation Committee
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Defend International (DI) urges Moroccan authorities to ensure that investigations and exhumations at mass grave sites in Western Sahara are carried out in line with international guidelines.

Oslo - Norway, January 15, 2008 / Defend International / Defend International urge the Moroccan authorities to conduct a thorough and transparent investigation of the mass grave site in the town of Samara in Western Sahara, to ensure the preservation of relevant evidence and to deal with them correctly.

According to the information received by members of DI Networks and DI Defenders, a mass grave was discovered on January 4, 2007, in a former military zone near the district of the city of Samara, as a construction company based in Casablanca started to implement a project in the city of Samara. On January 4, 2008, the mass grave was found accidentally by the company employees while digging.

The authorities reportedly buried the boons elsewhere without prior notice and without performing adequate autopsies or collecting crucial evidence which could have helped in identifying the perpetrators.

The loss of potential evidence is a serious violation of human rights. Cases such as the mass grave in Samara, and the mass grave in Al-Oyoun in Western Sahara discovered on November 2007, must be followed up and thoroughly investigated.

The sites are believed to contain the remains of victims killed in 1970es, and may be the biggest mass graves since the end of the conflict at that time, where persons were abducted and taken to unknown locations.

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Defend International call to bring the perpetrators to justice and to take urgent measures to preserve the evidence at the sites in order to determine the identities of the victims.

- Defend International urges Moroccan authorities to ensure that investigations and exhumations at mass grave sites are carried out in line with international recommendations, standards and guidelines, especially the UN

Model Protocol for Disinterment and Analysis of Skeletal Remains, which covers the procedures to follow by the authorities, if human remains are to be exhumed.

- Any failure of the authorities to bring perpetrators to justice will cause pain, concern and disappointment to the victims of human rights violations.

- Therefore, efforts should be made by authorities to identify human remains from mass graves and to allow the families of victims to bury their relatives with dignity. Their feelings should be taken into account in moral or legal calculations.