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# Briefing Notes Summary

Group 62 – Information Centre for Asylum and Migration

Morocco – January to June 2025

30 June 2025

## 10 March 2025

### **Leader of protests for earthquake victims sentenced to prison**

On 04.03.25, a Moroccan appeals court increased a jail sentence to one year against the activist Said Ait Mehdi, who led protests criticizing the government response to a devastating earthquake in September 2023 and who had been sentenced to three months in a first instance verdict, his lawyer said.

Local authorities had filed charges against Ait Mehdi for spreading fake news and defamation.<sup>1</sup>

## 17 March 2025

### **Blogger sentenced to two years in prison**

The blogger Redouane Kastit, who is known for his opposition to the normalisation of relations with Israel, was sentenced to two years in prison without parole in the court of first instance on 10.03.25. He was charged for his posts on social networks and found guilty of "insulting a public body", among other things. Kastit was arrested in Tangier on 05.02.25 and has been in custody ever since.<sup>2</sup>

## 14 April 2025

### **Mass pro-Palestinian protests**

Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Rabat on 06.04.25 against the conflict in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has resumed its anti-Hamas offensive after a two-month ceasefire. Pro-Palestinian protests also took place in Casablanca, the country's most populous city. The largest demonstrations in the country for several months were preceded by a corresponding appeal on the part of the Islamist-dominated coalition of the Justice and Development party. The demonstrators denounced Israel, the USA and their own government.

Whilst Moroccan authorities tolerate most demonstrations, they have arrested activists accused of targeting foreign embassies or linking their criticism to the monarchy. In 2020, Morocco signed the "Abraham Accords", a foreign policy push from the first Trump administration that saw several Arab countries normalise relations with Israel in return for diplomatic and financial concessions. In the case of Morocco, this primarily entailed recognition of its

sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara territory. This measure sparked controversy at that time, and continues to be rejected by large sections of the population.<sup>3</sup>

**30 Juni 2025**

**USA: Congress representatives call for the Polisario to be designated as a foreign terrorist organisation**

A bipartisan bill introduced in the US congress seeks to designate the Polisario Front as a “foreign terrorist organisation” (FTO). Even if the bill passes, under US law the final decision on designation however rests with secretary of state Marco Rubio. To persuade him, and congress, of the bill, the document emphasises the Polisario’s ties to Hezbollah and Iran, as well as threats of terrorist attacks against foreign interests in Western Sahara posed by the group.

If the “Polisario Front Terrorist Designation Act” were to be adopted, this could potentially have far-reaching consequences for the secessionist movement headquartered in the Algerian Sahara near Tindouf, which since decolonisation has been demanding an independent state on the territory of former Spanish Sahara, as well as for its supporters, above all the Algerian state. This would serve to shore up Algeria’s increasing diplomatic isolation (cf. BN of 28.04.25) with regard to the disputed Western Sahara region, albeit the implications for the protracted conflict between Morocco, on the one hand, and the Algerian-backed Polisario Front, on the other, cannot yet be foreseen.

Presumably as a reaction to the political developments, the Polisario Front launched five projectiles at the town of Es-Smara on 27.06.25, but without causing any damage. Since the end of the ceasefire in November 2020, the Polisario Front has carried out several sporadic attacks in the buffer zone to the east of the Moroccan security wall which goes through the entire Western Sahara territory. In October 2023, a similar attack in Es-Smara cost the life of a civilian and wounded three others, according to an official summary published at that time. The most recent attack by the Polisario on targets in Morocco took place in November 2024 near Al-Mahbès.<sup>4</sup>

**IMIS: Analysis of the impact of increasing water shortages; sixth year of drought**

A report recently published by the Institut Marocain d’Intelligence Stratégique (IMIS) paints a stark picture of the country’s years-long structural water crisis, and warns that the critical threshold to absolute water scarcity will be overstepped by 2035, failing a fundamental restructuring of development and agricultural policy, in particular with regard to improved resource management.

According to the report, the volume of water available per person per year has fallen over the past 50 years from 2,600 m<sup>3</sup> to as little as 600 m<sup>3</sup>. Should developments continue unchanged, it is hence likely to fall below the 500 m<sup>3</sup> mark by 2040. This development is said to be a consequence not of climate change alone, even though 2023 was the hottest since weather records started in Morocco, but also the result of water-intensive development policies, in particular in agriculture. More and more water-intensive crops such as avocados or watermelons have been planted for export in very dry areas, despite the fact that groundwater levels had already fallen there by several dozen metres in some cases.

The agricultural sector, which is the biggest water consumer by far, contributes more than 12 % to gross domestic product (GDP), and employs 30 % of the national workforce, this rising to more than 80 % of the population in rural areas. Morocco has been enduring the worst drought in its recent history for six years, already leading to the loss of more than one million jobs in rural areas between 2018 and 2023. The World Bank warned back in 2022 that the increasing water scarcity, concurrently with climate change, could lead to the loss of up to 6.5 % of GDP in the long term. Politicians and experts are also warning that increasing climate disruptions both in Morocco as well as in Tunisia and Algeria, coupled with rising temperatures each year, could threaten food security in these countries which are structurally reliant on food imports, particularly grains. In Morocco, the prolonged dry spell has also led to a shortage of grazing pastures for livestock, reducing meat production and driving up prices in the local market. In response, the country has increased imports of live cattle and sheep, as well as red meat, to meet demand. Anthropologist Zakaria Ibrahim argues in a detailed analysis that disadvantaged communities are

disproportionately affected by these developments, and that they would further exacerbate existing social inequalities.<sup>5</sup>

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