

To: Hon. Federica Mogherini

Brussels, 11 January 2018

Dear High Representative / Vice-President Mogherini,

For 15 months, there is social unrest across the Rif region in Morocco. Peaceful protests began after Mouhcine Fikri was crushed by a garbage compactor in Al Hoceima. Many citizens of the Rif went out on the streets against corruption, and for better education and health care in the impoverished region in the North of Morocco.

Since May 2017, security forces have arrested hundreds of protesters and several journalists in reaction. At least 400 people are currently detained and 66 of them have reported suffering torture and other ill-treatment in custody, such as being heavily beaten, suffocated, threatened with rape and insulted by the police. Some of the locked-up activists, including their leader Nasser Zefzafi, are kept in isolation and went on a hunger strike in protest of their inhumane treatment in prison.

Through families of EU-citizens living in the Rif and some Moroccan NGOs and lawyers, we have been informed that recently the Moroccan authorities have expanded their arrest campaigns and are now also detaining children for 'participating in demonstrations' - of which the youngest reported is only 6 years old. The alleged arrest and abuse of minors is very alarming.

As a result of all this, there is an alarming increase of young people from the Rif trying to reach the shores of Spain as they don't see a future for themselves in Morocco any longer. When basic rights of people are not respected and suppressed, this is a logical consequence.

I would like to call on you to urgently address these issues with the Moroccan government, and to urge the immediate release of political prisoners. Respect for human rights and the rule of law are key aspects of the EU's neighbourhood policy and a substantive amount of the EU's bilateral assistance to Morocco deals with equitable access to social services and sustainable and inclusive growth - both at the forefront of the Hirak movement's pleas.

I hope to be able to count on your support in this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

Kati Piri