



media release

Australian Council for International Development

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AUSTRALIAN NGOS CALL FOR WEST SAHARAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST TO BE ALLOWED TO RETURN HOME

The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), the peak body for Australian aid and development NGOs, joins many around the world in expressing our sympathy and solidarity with Aminatou Haidar, the Saharawi human rights defender, now in the third week of hunger strike in Lanzarote airport in the Canary Islands.

We express our deep concern about Mrs. Haidar's health and well-being. We urge the Moroccan authorities to return Ms Haidar's passport and to permit her to travel home to her family in Western Sahara and we call upon the Spanish Government to do its utmost to facilitate the return of Mrs. Haidar to her family and homeland as soon as possible".

Ms. Aminatou Haidar, who is president of the Collective of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA) is the recipient of many prizes for her work for the promotion of human rights in Western Sahara including the 2007 Silver Rose Award (Austria), the 2008 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, and the 2009 Civil Courage Prize. She was also nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.

Mrs Haidar was returning from the award ceremony of the Civil Courage Award in New York to her home in El Aaiun, the main city of Western Sahara when arrested by the Moroccan authorities. After many hours of interrogation they confiscated her passport and deported her to the Canary Islands, where the Spanish authorities allowed her to enter. However, when she wanted to return to El Aaiun they said she couldn't travel without a passport. This is what triggered her hunger strike.

A resolution of Mrs. Haidar's situation is urgently needed to safe her life and also safe the peace underway in Western Sahara.

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