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Morocco

Caravan in solidarity with Tamassint inhabitants

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Description:

The poor inhabitants of the town of Tamassint launched a battle for state aid, after their town was damaged by an earthquake in 2004. The Moroccan authorities viciously repressed the movement, leading to the building of an important solidarity movement to defend the townspeople.

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Tamassint is among the localities that remains distressed in the wake of the earthquake that shook the Rif region one year ago. Its inhabitants are protesting against the lack of any serious reconstruction policy and have been subjected to repeated repressive measures.

The march they organised on 19 May 2005 was violently put down and the town of Tamassint was surrounded by repressive forces. This is why an emergency mobilisation was set up to break the inhabitants' isolation.

A solidarity caravan organised by the El Hoceima section of the AMDH [\[1\]](#) alongside democratic, trade union and political associations coming from Casablanca, Agadir, Tata, Tetouan, Tanger, Nador, Targuiste and Al Hoceima journeyed to Tamassint on 28 and 29 May, 2005.

Tamassint

Tamassint is 30 km from Al Hoceima; its 15,000 inhabitants of Tamassint and douars scattered in the mountains (Zaouiat Sidi Issa, Aghlide, Idadouchen, Aït Aziz, Aït El Cadi,) have eked out a living from subsistence farming on small family plots and a few almond trees.

The region suffers droughts and water shortages. Infrastructures such as roads and hospitals are inadequate.



Tamassint is the village of Haddou Akchich, a combatant of the North African Liberation Army under the leadership of Mohamed Abdelkrim Khatabi. Refusing the Aix-les-Bains accords signed in 1956, viewing them as merely formal independence of Morocco, Haddou Akchich and his companions continued the struggle for the independence of all North Africa.

Tamassint remained a stronghold of resistance for the continuation of this struggle. In 1957, the village was circled by the army and its population massacred. Haddou Akchich was carried off in 1957 and disappeared.

This region was hard-hit by the Rif events in 1957-58. The army stepped in and many local people were killed, kidnapped and arrested. Terror and violence remain in the forefront of the inhabitants' memory...

After the earthquake

After the earthquake that shook the Rif region on 24 February 2004, Tamassint and the surrounding villages were particularly hard-hit. The lack of infrastructures, such as roads, water and electricity made this region a difficult to reach enclave. The population did not benefit from the emergency assistance that was hard to transport.

Young people in the region, many of them unemployed, organised in an association to demand state aid and reconstruction of decent housing. They refused the aid grant of 30000 dirhams, seeing the sum as inadequate for reconstruction. They also demanded a census of all damaged dwellings.

Throughout the entire year, they organised sit-ins on the weekly market day, to demand their rights and voice their protest. The authorities proposed no dialogue. The association was outlawed and the sit-ins subjected to strong police surveillance.

Repression - the authorities' only response

After a protest march to Ajdir on 14 April 2005, the co-ordinator of the association and two other people, accused of insults to civil servants and elected officials and of inciting riot and rebellion among the population, were arrested at Tamassint.

Their trial was set for 26 May in Nador. The population organised a march to protest this outrageous judgement on 19 May, towards Al Hoceima.

From 7am on Thursday 19 May, the inhabitants of Tamassint and the surrounding villages, including women and children, gathered for a march to the town of Al Hoceima.

An impressive police deployment prevented them from continuing their march. The population decided to hold a siege all night if need be. Around 4 p.m., the people took up a collection and sent out for water, bread and milk to continue their sit-in. The police blocked this action.

Faced with the gendarmes' insults and provocations, the inhabitants answered. Tension grew. The police shot blank bullets, the inhabitants responded by volleys of stones.

There were many wounded on both sides and the police squadron's cars and vans were damaged. The state police launched tear gas bombs by helicopter. Two members of the El Hoceima Human Rights Association (Omar Lamalem and Saïd Aachir) were severely beaten, taken off in police cars and let go in the wilderness. They later confirmed that they saw at least 30 injured people and as many arrests among the demonstrators. The gendarmes also insulted the people of the region and their history.

Until 10pm, the rumours grew. The roads were cut off, nobody could get near Tamassint. The only means of communication were cell phones. The population was totally isolated with no reporters or doctors on location.

The police went after the people who had taken shelter in the mountains, searched houses and launched searches for the wanted members of the association.

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On Friday 10 May: the police reinforced the ring surrounding the region, cutting the people off with no supplies. Transports to Tamassint were cut off, and schools, shops and cafés were closed.

A sit-in was organised in solidarity with the people of Tamassint by the AMDH at Al Hoceima, despite a strong contingent of police forces.

Saturday 21 May. Tamassint remained surrounded.

AMDH called for another sit-in at Al Hoceima. Omar Lamalem and Saïd Aachir, who had just been released from hospital, explained to a large and angry crowd what they had seen and been subjected to. They accused the authorities of serious human rights violations, including beatings in police cars...

Moreover, the Wali of Al Hoceima put pressure on the elected representatives to sign a petition breaking with the people's demands and supporting the Tamassint officials. On Sunday 22 May the police cleared out of the mountains but remained in Tamassint

According to the AMDH, the number of casualties and arrests after the events remains unknown. The toll of injured is unknown, and among the 35 people arrested, 9 remain in custody.

The democratic associations support the Tamassint townspeople's' demands, namely:

- ▶ The right to government reconstruction of decent housing
- ▶ A census of all damaged dwellings that had received no state assistance
- ▶ Free all people in custody
- ▶ An end to prosecutions of 19 May 2005 demonstrators.

Solidarity caravan to break their isolation

On Monday 23 May there was support march in Tangier, and on Tuesday 24 May a similar march in Tetouan.

Thursday 26 May was meant to be the day of the sentencing of members of the association in Nador. A rally was called by human rights associations, political and trade union organisations, brought out more than 300 people in front of the Nador courthouse. The sentencing was put off.

On Saturday 28 May, the support demonstration called by the Al Hoceima AMDH was forbidden. The rally outside the AMDH office was closely watched by the police and the demonstrators were blocked in a narrow lane, during the sit in. Representatives of the caravan from Tanger and Tetouan spoke to the crowd and everyone took up the slogans.

Sunday, 29 May, was market day in Tamassint. From 9 am, the members of the caravan were welcomed in the AMDH office at El Hoceima and small groups organised to set off for Tamassint.

Twelve kilometers from Imzouren, we crossed a semi-desert region. There were a few scattered dwellings, unfinished buildings that were concrete proof that the 30,000 dirhams in assistance granted by the State to rebuild

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houses destroyed by the earthquake were not enough to enable the people to rebuild their dwellings, which remained merely building sites.

One year and a half years after the earthquake, the tents provided are still up, in shreds after the summer heat and last winter's snow and cold wave. All the way along the narrow, bumpy road leading to Tamassint, we encounter the same landscape in ruins.

Gendarmes are still present outside the only grocery shop, the exact spot where the 19 May confrontations broke out, when the police drew back and blocked supplies for the Tamassint people on sit-in.

We arrived in the damaged village of Tamassint, on the town's only dusty square. The members of the caravan were welcomed by the townspeople who had already gathered. "Tamassint resists, long live solidarity" was the first slogan shouted out. It was taken up by activists who had come from Tanger, Tetouan, Nador, Targuist but also more distant towns and cities: Casablanca, Agadir and even Tata [\[2\]](#) .

The activists from the Tamassint association, still wanted and seeking refuge in the mountains, arrived surrounded by children. The slogans grew louder and the crowd drew closer together. Hami and his comrades were welcomed as heroes. "Neither fear nor repression will stop a popular march". "For shame, their reconciliation through bludgeons".

"The earthquake may be a natural disaster, but our marginalisation is a political choice;" "Record for history, the resistance of the outsiders;" "Continue our resistance, for our right to housing and reconstruction."

"They speak of a state of law, you can see the marginalised population, where are our houses?"; "We demand an end to the siege, rebuilding, freedom for our prisoners"; "Tamassint forgotten and circled, with no housing or amenities".

For several hours the crowd remained in the square, crying out in anger and re-affirming their determination. Small groups of people showed up. The police remained in the distance and did not appear on the scene.

A march went round the village to the marketplace, gathering around 3000 people, then it headed to the centre of the village. A member of the Tamassint association spoke, and slogans rang out. He spoke of the village of Tamassint's struggle and resistance and called for the mobilisation to continue, for an end to the siege, rebuilding, freeing the prisoners.

Then the representatives of the caravan spoke. Firstly, Tetouan, represented by Ahmed M'rabet, originally from the region and who lived for 5 years in Cairo with A. Khatabi. These were impressive words from a man who represented the memories of several generations of struggle, among those who chose to continue A. Khatabi's struggle for their entire lives, without compromise or recanting.

He spoke to the different generations gathered here in front of what remains of one of the commandment posts of the short-lived Rif Republic. Tamassint has always been a bulwark of the resistance of the Rif people. This struggle kept alive by Haddou Akchich remains forceful in Tamassint.

Among the audience we can see the faces of old people marked by years of fear and repression, and youths filled with determination. Ahmed M'rabet, in the name of this historical memory that refuses to be quashed, reminds the crowd that the determination shown by the people of Tamassint only continues this tradition. "Si Mohand [\[3\]](#) , we are continuing the struggle", cried out the crowd after his speech.

After the Tanger caravan representative spoke, the people heard from the representative of ATTAC who came from Casablanca to affirm their support and the need to unite struggles to support the demands of the Tamassint people. Then came a representative from Agadir, who recalled that after the Agadir earthquake in 1960, luxury complexes were rebuilt but the marginalised people still live in shantytowns and unsanitary neighbourhoods.

From Tata, a young activist came to express the support of Tata inhabitants, also struggling for the right to health, in this faraway region marginalised and kept on the sidelines, fighting for their basic rights. From Nador and Targuiste, the demands were raised:

- ▶ an end to the surrounding of Tamassint
- ▶ freedom for the prisoners [4]
- ▶ government reconstruction of decent housing

An Angry Springtime

Morocco is living through an Angry Springtime from the North to the South.

After six trade-unionist mineworkers sentenced to ten years' in prison were freed as a result of a national and international solidarity campaign, after the Tata demonstrations for the right to health, after the demonstrations by the people in Khenifra, by fishermen, the movement against marginalisation in Sidi Ifni and just recently in Laayoun, despite harsh repression by the authorities, nothing stops the anger of the people pushed to the sidelines, left unemployed, and all the forgotten people of "Morocco from below".

The "useful Morocco" built under the pressure and modelled by neoliberal globalisation has disastrous impacts on the people. And people in the most isolated regions are challenging it. From the North to the South, basic demands are being raised by the population.

Fifty years after independence, the people still lack housing, health care, education, infrastructures and amenities. They have only received repression, terror, marginalisation: street children, illiteracy, unemployed graduates, candidates for clandestine passages to Spain in small boats, repudiated women in the streets. What little public services exist have been privatised and challenges are raised to labour law, education undergoes "reforms", and trade-union freedoms are curtailed.

Despite this, political and trade union organisations have not fulfilled their duty to resist and to support struggles. This casts discredit on so-called civil society associations, often corrupt and venial, promoting a sham democracy.

The grumbings of an angry spring can be heard. A new generation is appearing everywhere, demanding to speak out and struggle on its own, and no longer trusting in empty slogans and endless oratory from corrupt and powerless leaders. The springtime of the Morocco from below is raising its voice from Tamasint to Laayoun, from the North to the South, from Ajdir to Agadir.

30 May 2005

Send emails and faxes in protest before 9 June to the following addresses:

The Prime Minister: courrier@pm.gov.ma Fax n° 037768656

Caravan in solidarity with Tamassint inhabitants

The Minister of Justice: courrier@mj.gov.ma Fax n° : 212 037723710

The Minister of the Interior: courrier@mi.gov.ma Fax n° 212 037766861 / 037767404

And a copy to solidarite_tamasint@yahoo.fr

[1] AMDH Association marocaine des droits de l'homme (Moroccan Human Rights Association).

[2] Tata is a small town in the anti-Atlas region of the far south of Morocco.

[3] This refers to Mohand Ben Abdelkrim AL KHATTABI the hero of the Rif.

[4] Mouaatasim Galbzouri (Co-ordinator of the Tamasint association), Aberkan M'hamed (70 years old) and young Ghalid Salim are all in custody at the civil prison in Nador.