

Recent Returnee Profiles



Naba Deddah El Meki was born in Morocco in 1966. Telling no one, including her closest family members, of her plans to flee the camps for fear that she would be prevented from leaving, she returned to Morocco with her 25 year old daughter in February 2008. Her mother, five sisters, and one brother still reside in the refugee camps in Algeria. Two other adult children are in school in Algeria but were not living in the camps when she and her oldest daughter fled to Morocco. She had lived in the camps since 1975. She was a district coordinator for the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the refugees living in four separate neighborhoods of Smara refugee camp and has extensive first hand knowledge of the routine theft and sale for profit of this aid by the Polisario leadership and its close associates.

Naha Al Salek Sidi was born in Dakhla refugee camp in 1978 and returned to Morocco with her two infant children during a UN sponsored family visit program in January 2008. She told no one of her intention to remain in Morocco with her children when she departed on the UN family visit program for fear that she would not be allowed to go. Her husband, mother, three brothers, and a sister still reside in the camps. Naha Al Salek Sidi, who is handicapped, worked in the office of humanitarian assistance for the handicapped at the Polisario headquarters camp in Rabouni. She has extensive first hand knowledge of the theft and sale for profit by the Polisario of medical supplies and equipment provided by international humanitarian NGOs intended for the handicapped.



Salma Essalek and Said Abderahman – Salma and her husband Said were born in the refugees camps in 1983 and 1980 respectively. They returned to Morocco together in November 2007, taking the dangerous route over the desert through minefields and Algerian and Polisario patrols reaching the defensive military berm constructed by the Moroccan army. Salma is expecting a child. The young couple decided to flee the camps to ensure that their unborn child would not have to grow



up in the same miserable conditions that they had endured. In a pre-dawn departure, the couple engaged a smuggler to take them to the berm. They were dropped off several hundred meters from the berm when a Polisario patrol began to pursue them. A tense stand off between Moroccan soldiers at the berm and the armed Polisario patrol ensued, but eventually the soldiers were able to rescue the young couple and bring them to safety through the mine fields. Both have extensive family still in the camps, but neither told anyone of their planned flight to Morocco.

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Al Afia Hammidi was born in Morocco in 1970 and was taken to the camps as a child along with three brothers. Her brothers previously had fled the camps and returned to Morocco. She returned to Morocco with three of her five small children in January 2008 on a UN sponsored family visit. Her husband knew that she intended to stay in Morocco and is currently caring for their two remaining small children in the camps. She has formally petitioned the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to repatriate her two remaining children to join her in Morocco. Her husband is in full agreement with this request as he also has aged parents to care for in the camps.

However, to date neither the UNHCR nor the Polisario Front has replied to her request. Despite the family's wishes, the two small children are still confined in the camps by the Polisario.

Brahim Al Selem was born in Morocco in 1974 and was taken to the camps as a child. He returned to Morocco with his sister and her two children in August 2007 with the aid of a smuggler in a truck carrying international humanitarian assistance supplies diverted from the refugees to black markets in Mauritania. His wife remains in the camps. He was previously arrested, a year before his eventual escape from the camps, for expressing openly his dissatisfaction with the Polisario Front regime and saying that he wanted to return to Morocco. He was jailed for two and a half months. He has first hand knowledge of the extensive theft of humanitarian aid, including medical equipment and supplies, and the routine practice of smuggling and bribery through which the Polisario leadership and its allies continue to profit. He also has first hand information about human rights abuses by Polisario authorities, including information about secret detention centers *and a prison compound for unwed mothers and their children*, which he saw first hand during the course of his work.

