

## **Exploding the Myths**

“The truth about the events surrounding the release of the Moroccan POWs”

*November 14, 2005*

### **1 - “Releasing the 404 Moroccan POWs was a very politically complicated issue, which is why the process took so long.”**

Alleviating human suffering, bringing an end to torture and reuniting long-separated families are simple, humanitarian issues. There is nothing political or complicated about defending basic human rights.

### **2 - “Morocco still hasn’t released the POWs it’s holding.”**

Morocco is not holding any POWs. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has confirmed this claim. (For more details on the ICRC report and the UN findings, please visit: <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord1998/documentation/security/s-1998-534.htm>). The Polisario Front continues to make this baseless allegation to hide its own blatant disregard for the protection of basic human rights by holding the 404 POWs for so many years.

### **3 - “Morocco needs to account for the thousands of “missing” or “disappeared” prisoners.”**

There are no missing prisoners being held by the Government of Morocco. However, there are still missing combatants on both sides. The Government of Morocco has cooperated with the International Red Cross to investigate cases of missing combatants from a list officially provided by the Polisario Front. However, to date the Polisario Front has given the Red Cross no information about missing Moroccan combatants on a similar list provided to the Polisario Front through the International Red Cross.

### **4 - “The decision to release the 404 Moroccan POWs was an humanitarian gesture of good-will by the Polisario.”**

The 404 Moroccan POWs were finally released thanks to international pressure from world leaders, NGOs and, most importantly, thousands of concerned pro-active individuals all over the world. In the face of such a united and clear voice condemning their continued detention of the 404 Moroccan POWs, the Polisario Front had no choice but to finally comply with international law and do what should have been done years ago.

### **5 - “Morocco stirred protests and disorder in the Tindouf Camps which delayed the release of the POWs.”**

The increased tension and protests in the Tindouf Camps and elsewhere in Morocco was the result of growing frustration and anger over the Polisario Front's continuing refusal to release, once and for all, the 404 Moroccan POWs.

**6 - "The real reason for the repeated delays was that the Polisario Front was busy working out the 'logistics' of the POW release with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)."**

According to the ICRC, the Polisario Front made no effort to work out "logistics" of the release of the 404 Moroccan POWs. Concerted international pressure forced the Polisario Front to keep its word. (Click here to read more about the lack of communication with the ICRC by the Polisario:

<http://www.freethemnow.org/The%20Washington%20Times.htm> )

**7 - "The Polisario Front is a self-supported independence movement and receives no backing from Algeria, who is merely an observer to the conflict."**

The Polisario Front is supported financially and politically by the Algerian Government. Algeria may claim that it is merely an observer to the disputes surrounding the 404 Moroccan POWs and the on-going humanitarian crisis in the Tindouf Camps, but in reality Algeria is a very active, although often unseen, party.

**8 - "Morocco was responsible for the poor conditions and lack of food and resources in the Tindouf camps where the POWs were held."**

The Polisario Front has stolen much of the humanitarian aid intended for those in the Tindouf Camps and resold it for their own personal profit. In fact, many international humanitarian aid organizations have stopped providing aid to the Tindouf Camps because it was clear that those most in need never received the aid. (Click here to read the report by France Libertés, an international Human Rights NGO, which documents this diversion of aid: <http://www.freethemnow.org/FranceLiberte.pdf>)

**9 - "World leaders have had little to say about the plight of the Moroccan POWs."**

Political leaders from all over the world, such as US President Bush, US Senators John McCain and Richard Lugar, US Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, have spoken out in favor of the Moroccan POWs. (Click here to see exactly what they had to say: "[What People Are Saying](#)") In fact, the ultimate release of the 404 Moroccan POWs was thanks, in part, to their strong, unified stance for the protection of basic human rights.

**10 - "The effort to free the Moroccan POWs came primarily from Morocco and Moroccans."**

The effort to free the Moroccan POWs was an international, non-partisan response to end a humanitarian crisis. Over 6,000 people representing more than 100 countries signed the FreeThemNow.org online petition for the immediate and unconditional release of the Moroccan POWs. Human rights supporters in the United States, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Gibraltar, organized protests and vigils in support of the 404 Moroccan POWs.

**11 - “The Moroccan POWs suffered very little and weren’t really ‘prisoners’.”**

Testimonies by former Moroccan POWs have provided vivid and graphic accounts of physical and emotional torture, slave labor and flagrant human rights violation at the hands of the Polisario Front in the Tindouf Camps. These atrocities were meticulously documented in a 2003 report by France Libertés, an international Human Rights NGO. (Click here to read the France Libertés report:

<http://www.freethemnow.org/FranceLiberte.pdf>) In May 2005, a group of former Moroccan POWs traveled to Washington DC and met with key US lawmakers to bring awareness about the atrocious human rights violations they suffered in captivity and were still being suffered by their fellow POWs. (Click here to read more about the visit of the former Moroccan POWs:

[http://www.freethemnow.org/POWs\\_AP\\_May\\_23\\_05.htm](http://www.freethemnow.org/POWs_AP_May_23_05.htm))

**12 - “There is nothing that Algeria could have done to release the POWs and it has little influence to fully resolve the on-going humanitarian crisis in the Tindouf Camps.”**

Algeria is the primary sponsor of the Polisario Front and without its continued multi-faceted support, the Polisario Front wouldn’t exist today. If Algeria had wanted the Moroccan POWs released, it could have influenced the process. Algeria could and should do the same to bring an end to the continuing suffering of those still held in the Tindouf Camps.