

**Dear Sir/Madam,**

We would hereby like to share with you the findings of our study on the child's right to freedom of expression. Over the past two years we have studied the situation for children living in the area that the United Nations call the area of Western Sahara that is "West of the Berm".

We are sharing this draft report with you, because you are interested and/or involved with children who are living in this area. Please note that this is a draft report. It is not a final version, and we would like to ask your feedback, before publishing a final report.


When reading the draft report, please keep in mind that the report is about children, and about what can be done to better protect the rights of children growing up "West of the Berm".

If you have any feedback at all, whether you think it is a great report or you think many things are incorrect, or anything else, we would very much like to hear from you. You can contact us by sending a message via the phone app Telegram, Signal or Wire on **+31 649 771 232**, or via email at: [childrensrights@maastrichtuniversity.nl](mailto:childrensrights@maastrichtuniversity.nl).

Thank you for your interest, kind regards,



**Marieke Hopman**



**This is a  
draft report**



# 'Things that a child shouldn't say'

The right to freedom of expression for children living West of the Berm.

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# AREA UNDER CONSIDERATION

“Freedom of thought does not mean the protection and justification of the wrong, for the wrong will eventually fade away. What we can do is fight the thought with thought.”

- Muhammad Alghazali  
(Islamic scholar)

“In a study about the rights of children there is only one party: children themselves. The interest of that party is to have good, quality, objective representation of facts and a presentation of findings that goes beyond the two conflicting parties.”

- Jan Pronk  
(former UN Special Representative)

In this report, we focus on children living in the area that:

- The United Nations call the area of Western Sahara that is “West of the Berm”.
- Moroccan authorities call its “Southern Provinces”.
- Sahrawi authorities call the “Occupied Territories”.

It’s the area that is to the left of the red line on this map. Because we are interested in the rights of children living in this area, and not in picking a side in the conflict, we will use the UN term for this area and refer to it as “WB” (“West Berm”).

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Research On Childrens Rights

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# INTRODUCTION

According to international law, all children have the right to freedom of expression. This means that they have a right to say what they think, but also to remain silent if they wish. It means that they should have access to all information they find interesting, and that they should be allowed to share any idea or opinion that they have, without negative consequences. This freedom is important for children's development. It enables children to grow up and develop their own ideas, to become citizens who can contribute to public life.

**Do children living in WB have this right? For more than two years we, a research team from Maastricht University, have been studying this question. In this report we will share the answers we found.**

This report is written first and foremost for people living in WB. It is written for all adults who care about children. From politicians, teachers and parents to family and community members.

It is a **DRAFT REPORT**, and we would very much like to hear your feedback (see accompanying letter).

While reading the report, it is important to keep in mind that we are not trying to pick sides in the conflict between the Sahrawi and the Moroccans. Because the conflict plays such an important role, it is impossible not to mention it. But while reading, please keep in mind that this report is about the children living in WB, regardless of their background. These children go to school together, they live together, they are the future. And their rights are being violated. So please think about these children if at any point you disagree with anything in this report. Because we have tried to present to you what we found, and, more importantly: to share ideas on how the rights of these children can be better protected in the future.



# HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

To find out if children living in WB are free to express themselves, we considered information from three different sources:

## 1 A RESEARCH STAY IN WB

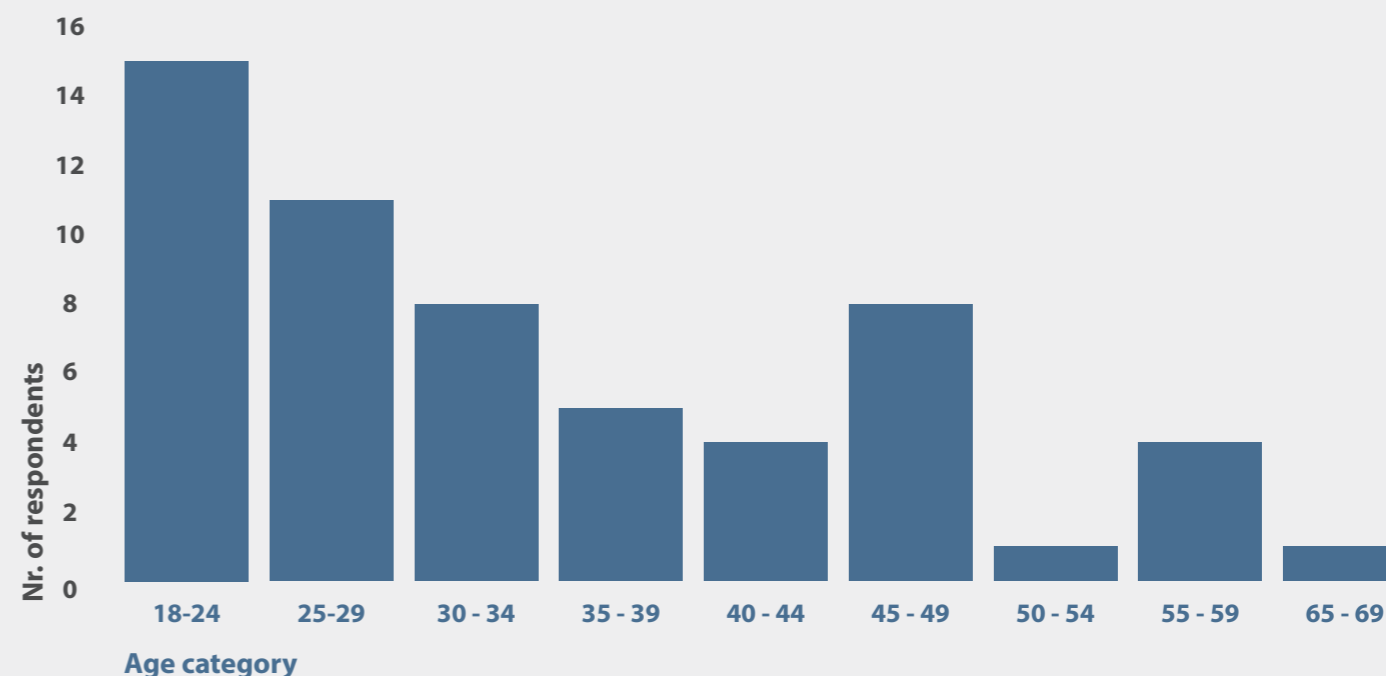
For 18 days, two of our researchers travelled around in WB. We visited Laayoune, Boujdour, Dakhla and some smaller villages. During this time we travelled as tourists and did not tell anyone about the purpose of our visit, because we were afraid that the Moroccan authorities would not allow this study.

## 2 INTERVIEWS: ONLINE AND OFFLINE

We interviewed 57 people: 31 while we were in WB, and 26 online. 25% of the respondents were women, 75% were men. Respondents had the following background:

Background		
Moroccan	15	26%
Sahrawi	26	46%
Other	7	12%
Unknown	9	16%

## AGE OF RESPONDENTS



We did not interview any children because we did not want them to be at risk. To learn about the reality for children in WB today, we spoke to those who were children recently, as well as to parents and teachers, who engage with children on a daily basis. We only considered information on things that happened within the last 10 years.

## 3 LITERATURE RESEARCH

We studied many different sources in different languages (Arabic, English, French, Spanish). This included academic publications, NGO reports, media articles and information on websites. At the end of the report you can find an overview of some relevant literature.





# WHAT IS THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

Before presenting the results of our study, we first want to explain a bit more about what this right to freedom of expression means.

According to international law, all people in the world have the right to freedom of expression, including children. This right has been codified in the Universal Declaration of Human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Morocco has agreed to protect these rights.

This means that everyone in WB has the right to freely speak or stay silent about any topic they choose. It also means that everyone in WB has the right to read, search for and discuss any kind of information they choose. It means that no one, not even the state, is allowed to limit this right in any way. There is one important exception: you are not allowed to use violence, or to cause others to use violence.



# WHY IS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IMPORTANT?

Many arguments exist for why freedom of expression is important. Here we present the arguments that are relevant for children living in WB.

## 1. Allowing the expression of both true and untrue ideas is important

According to philosopher John Stuart Mill, it is always important to allow people to express their ideas, even if they are not true. This is for three reasons:

1. It is very difficult to know what is the truth, so we shouldn't forbid any ideas that we think are false, because we could be wrong and they may be true.
2. If you think you know the truth, this knowledge can become stronger when you are confronted with a falsehood. If we forbid the expression of any falsehood, we will not see the truth more clearly.
3. We cannot trust that an idea is true, if no one is allowed to contradict it. You can learn what is true only when you first listen to people with different kinds of ideas.

## 2. Freedom of expression is necessary for cultural development

According to economist Amartya Sen, a culture needs new ideas to develop. If we take one idea and say that this is the truth forever and we don't allow anyone to express different ideas, our culture cannot develop.

## 3. Freedom of expression is necessary for good political leadership

The Chinese ruler Mao (a dictator) experienced that not allowing people to freely express their ideas and experiences can lead to great disasters. The unfreedom in China was an important cause of the Chinese famines of 1958-1961, which killed almost 30 million people. People were afraid to complain

and share true information of what was going wrong, and therefore the leaders of China didn't know how serious the situation was. Therefore, freedom of expression is necessary for political leaders to know what is truly going on in the country.

## 4. Freedom of expression is important for the child's development

When a child is free to exchange thoughts with others, this contributes to the child's development. Children learn to look at an issue from different perspectives, to listen to different arguments and then to make their own decision. They will learn that different people see things differently, and they learn how to navigate these differences. They also learn not to believe everything they hear, but to think critically and collect information.

## 5. Freedom of expression is necessary for the development of society

Freedom of expression is necessary for the development of society. As one of our respondents said:

**INTERVIEW 57 (ONLINE)**  
A Moroccan NGO employee (age 65-69)

*'We have to develop children, because they are the adults of tomorrow, and this country needs developed, educated people. Freedom of expression will contribute to the development of the country [...] If we have people who accept everything without criticizing, we will never be able to develop, to advance, the things will not improve. The country is then not pushed to improve itself. It is the basis of democracy: power and counter-power.'*

# DO CHILDREN IN WB HAVE A RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

The answer is: yes and no. In theory, children in WB are free to express themselves. This includes the right to think what they want and express their thoughts, the right to peaceful protest and the right to freedom of religion. These rights can be found in Moroccan laws (in the 2011 Constitution: art. 3, 25, 29). In practice, there is a lot that children in WB are allowed to discuss. However, there are subjects that are taboo. What is not allowed is:

1. Criticizing or insulting the King and/or his family
2. Discussing the Western Sahara, in particular the question of whether it is or isn't Moroccan
3. Questioning religion (Islam)
4. Sexuality outside of marriage, everything having to do with non-heterosexual sexual preferences

Who creates these taboos? The answer to this question is quite simple: almost all adults living in WB. Parents limit their children's expression, telling them what not to talk about and punishing them if they disobey. Teachers set limits to free discussion in the classroom. Moroccan authorities create a general culture of unfreedom through laws, controls and formal and informal punishments. This is how different actors limit the child's right to freedom of expression in WB:

## THE MOROCCAN STATE

Under Moroccan law, breaking any of the taboos (King, Western Sahara, Islam, sexuality) is illegal. It is for example illegal to "undermine, insult and/or disrespect the King and/or the Royal family". It is not illegal to discuss the Western Sahara, but it is illegal to say anything that can "harm the territorial integrity of the Kingdom", which comes down to the same thing. It is also illegal to "undermine Islamic religion", to engage in homosexual acts or have sex outside of marriage, and to share false accusations or information about Moroccan political leaders.

According to the law, punishment for breaking these laws is either imprisonment of 6 months to 5 years, a fine between 20.000-500.000 dirham, and/or being stripped of certain civil rights. But no matter what you do, the police never have the right to torture you, even if you are a criminal. **It is also illegal for police officers to injure or beat a child younger than 15 years old.** Children under age 12 can never be arrested, and children between the ages of 12 and 18 can be imprisoned only if this is absolutely necessary.

In practice, there are three ways in which children living in WB are confronted by state authority in relation to their right to freedom of expression:



## 1. DIRECT PUNISHMENT

If children break any of the taboos mentioned above: they can receive a police beating and/or be held at a police station for one or two nights.

## 2. DIRECT VICTIMISATION

The police may follow these children and harass them, if their parents are known to have broken the taboos

## 3. INDIRECT VICTIMISATION

Children suffer indirectly if adult family members are punished for breaking the taboos, for example if the family loses its income, has to move, the home is under surveillance, or they see someone getting beaten up by the police.

The indirect victimisation of children due to their parent's transgression of the state limitations on the right to freedom of expression is illustrated well by this Sahrawi activist parent:

### INTERVIEW 45 (ONLINE) An 45-49 year old Sahrawi activist and parent

*The police sometimes came to my house, [there was] constant surveillance of the house, that scared my daughter [...] She's always scared, she always talks to me 'We should move, my dad'. She can't resist. 'Dad, we should leave the city of Laayoune. We should move to another city or another country'. And still now she always asks me to leave. [...] To be honest, I'm thinking about this. She's 11 and I couldn't resist. Earlier I told her the story of my father. He was captured in 1976, so I didn't see my father ever. I told my daughter that probably one day, you will not see me. I will be arrested, captured, jailed, killed.*



## THE WB COMMUNITY

On the community level, these taboos are enforced by people in the street. People in the WB community pressure each other to self-censor. This happens mostly by talking negatively about those who dare to discuss any of the taboos, but physical violence is also an option. In this way, children learn from an early age not to discuss these subjects in public.

### INTERVIEW 52 (ONLINE) A 18-24 year old Moroccan woman who grew up and lives in WB

*There are things that a child shouldn't say, out of respect for your nation, your parents, your family and yourself. For example you don't go out and say "I don't like, or hate, Morocco, I don't want to live here". It's not good for you. You won't go to jail, but you will find yourself, [on] social media people talk about you "this is a bad girl, she doesn't deserve to live".*



## THE SCHOOL

Schools in WB uphold the taboos of the Moroccan state, both for teachers and students. While this differs somewhat per school, in general, one is not allowed to:

- Criticize/question religion
- Discuss sexuality / non-heterosexual preferences
- Discuss the WS conflict
- Criticize/question the Royal family

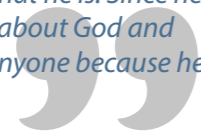
In education these subjects are touched upon directly, for example in history and geography class. However, their study is limited to the “truths” presented in the Moroccan nationalist narrative (see p. 14). No discussion is allowed. If children don’t comply with these rules, they may receive failing grades, be bullied by other children, teachers may call their parents or they may be expelled from school. If teachers discuss these subjects, they may face complaints from parents and/or students, be transferred to another city, or get fired. Teachers are also supposed to report on students who break the taboos.

## THE FAMILY

Families in WB generally teach children what they are not supposed to speak about. If a child breaks a taboo in the family, the most common punishment seems to be for the child to be beaten by parents/ siblings, or being excluded, as explained by this respondent:

### INTERVIEW 46 (ONLINE) A 25-29 year old Sahrawi

*In the imagination of Muslims, if a person doesn't pray they are out of Islam [...] [The family] doesn't talk to him, and doesn't eat with him. That's how as a child you know, that you pray and don't ask, so that my dad talks to me. I have a friend in Rabat [who] is [an] atheist and he can't just tell anyone that he is. Since he was a child [he] had these questions about God and religion, but he couldn't say that to anyone because he was scared.*





# THE STORIES

What we also found in is that there are two dominant stories which people tell about the Western Sahara conflict. These are stories about the history of the Western Sahara, about the two peoples (Moroccans and Sahrawi) and how they live together today. These stories play an important role in limiting the freedom of expression of children living in WB.

## NARRATIVE 1: HISTORY ACCORDING TO MOROCCAN NATIONALISTS

According to Moroccan nationalists, WS is, and should be, Moroccan. Before colonisation, Morocco was a larger Kingdom that included the WS. At the end of the Spanish occupation, the Moroccan people united in a peaceful action called the Green March. They liberated the people of the Western Sahara by marching into the territory with nothing but Qurans and national flags in their hands. Since then, Morocco has done a great job of developing the area.

## NARRATIVE 2: HISTORY ACCORDING TO SAHRAWI ACTIVISTS

According to Sahrawi activists, WB belongs to the Sahrawi, yet it is occupied illegally by Morocco, who invaded the country directly after Spain left in 1975. The "Green March" was a military invasion during which the WS civilian population was bombarded, involving the use of both napalm and cluster bombs. Until today, Morocco is denying the Sahrawi people their right to self-determination. The Moroccans are interested in the land only because they want to exploit its natural resources.

### INTERVIEW 13 (OFFLINE) A 40-44 year old Moroccan

Morocco used to be "large Morocco", stretching out to Mauritania, but it was too large for Morocco to keep control of so it turned to the small Morocco we know today. Then when the Spanish left, Morocco came back to their old lands.



## SAHRAWI ACTIVISTS ABOUT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN WB

Since the occupation, Sahrawi living in WB have been subjected to systematic human rights violations by the Moroccan authorities, whose goal is to erase the Sahrawi identity in a process called "Moroccanization". This process includes changing the demographics of the territory by sending many Moroccan settlers to live in the occupied territories (WB). In the occupied territories, the Moroccan military police holds a reign of terror. Sahrawis in the occupied territories continue to be prosecuted, tortured, imprisoned or made to disappear, simply for showing their Sahrawi identity. An example of this is the dismantling by the Moroccan military of a peaceful protest camp (Gdeim Izik), leading to the arrest of dozens of activists of which 19 are still incarcerated as political prisoners today. Sahrawi children are a victim of this policy: they suffer torture by the police if they protest and they are forced to "Moroccanize" as part of their (state) education.

An example is this scene from Equipe Media documentary "3 stolen cameras" (2017):

We see a boy dressed in nothing but his underwear, the camera is moving around him, he looks at the ground, pictures are also being taken. There are many injuries on his body.

Boy (age 14): 'I was in Dadach Avenue. I passed by an alley. I saw people were running. Then a group of police surrounded me. They took me to an isolated place behind the taxi station in Laayoune. They told me that the death's troop arrested me. They started hitting me. They took my arm like this and beat it. They took a lighter trying to burn my hair. They were spitting on my face and saying bad things. And beating me. Long live the [Polisario] front!'

## MOROCCAN NATIONALISTS ABOUT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN WB

All people in Morocco, including those living in the Southern Provinces, have complete freedom of expression. The Sahrawi people are part of the Moroccan people and initiatives are being taken to preserve their identity. Peaceful protest is allowed, but violent protest is not. There is a small, violent group called Polisario, who are closely related to Algeria and claim that the WB is their land. They are eager to use violence to take over the WB. Some Sahrawi living in WB are members of the Polisario. These separatists use violence against the Moroccan authorities. One example of this is the premeditated murder of 11 members of the Moroccan police forces and civil protection, and the mutilation of their corpses, during the Gdeim Izik events. The separatists use their children for this violent cause, urging them to protest and throw rocks at the police, which is a violation of these children's rights.

Children living in WB get caught in between these two conflicting narratives. They learn from an early age that one of these stories is true, and the other false. They are supposed to believe and repeat the story that their family believes. If they are children of Sahrawi activists, they learn one story at home and another at school.

In this respect, also, children in WB are not free to express their own thoughts and ideas, and to exchange thoughts with their friends, classmates and teachers. The dominant narratives are closed stories: they are not open to change, to questioning, or to adding new information. If you disagree or propose even a small change to the story, you risk being considered an enemy. For example, if a Moroccan would mention that perhaps the Western Sahara is not historically Moroccan, they would immediately be categorized as an enemy of the state, and possibly a Polisario/ Algerian agent or spy, by Moroccan nationalists. Similarly, if a Sahrawi would publish a story about any violence committed by a Sahrawi against Moroccan police, they would be accused by Sahrawi activists of siding with the enemy, of damaging the cause.



# CONSEQUENCES

**We have shown that the right to freedom of expression is very limited for children living in WB. Limitations are found on all levels of society (state, community, school and family). The situation is heavily influenced by the existence of two dominant narratives (Moroccan nationalist and Sahrawi activist).**

**This situation has several consequences:**

First, the system of surveillance instils fear in children. While they are not being watched all the time, simply knowing that they could be watched or listened to has a “chilling effect”. This means that they are scared to speak their mind, and will self-censor just in case they are being watched. They keep thoughts about taboos to themselves, because they fear disapproval or punishment by others. In this way, the Moroccan state, but also the community, the school and the family are at work to plant a policeman in the child’s mind, making the child ask “Can I say this?”, or even: “Can I think this?”.

For children who are not (yet) interested in issues of politics, religion, sexuality, and whose friends and family are not involved in these issues either, this thought police may not create many problems. For this reason, the WB restrictions on freedom of expression may not have so much impact on very young children (with the exception of children whose parents or close family members transgress these limitations). However, for those who are, or whose families are, interested in these topics, this thought police may be very hard to live with.

One of the taboos is the Western Sahara conflict. For children living in WB, this taboo is all around them. It is part of their school education, of their family history and it is ever present in the area in which they live. For this taboo, the dominant stories (Sahrawi activist and Moroccan nationalist) play an important role. Their presence means that children are not free to give meaning to their own experiences that have to do with this conflict. For example: A Sahrawi who is beaten by a policeman after having engaged in a protest will understand

this as systematic violence by the occupying force (the Moroccan state). A Moroccan hearing about a policeman beating a Sahrawi protester will interpret this as an act of necessity for the protection of the people against violent protesters.

Even the identity of these children has been established by the dominant stories before they were born. Arguably, this situation is harder on the Sahrawi children than on Moroccan children, since the Sahrawi story is a story of suppression and suffering. The greatest frustration for the Sahrawi activist living in Western Sahara is their loss of identity, for which they blame the Moroccan state, and the fact that Moroccan authorities do not allow them to speak freely about this experience. This frustration can lead to violence, as explained by one of our respondents:

**INTERVIEW 40 (ONLINE)**  
A 25-29 year old Sahrawi

“*In my second secondary school, I engaged in a protest to give us access to the cafeteria and the theatre and the right to freedom of expression because we are not allowed, and independence. I was arrested and taken to the suburbs by plain clothed police [...] I was about 15 [...] I was naked, I was tortured with sticks. They took all of my clothes and they were beating me with sticks and water and they were spitting on me [...] I was not aware of what I was doing. I was just a teenager, a kid. When they arrested me the first time, some asked me about what I was saying, I was saying like ‘there’s no alternative to selfdetermination’. I was asked ‘What is self-determination?’ and I said ‘I don’t know’. [...] I really didn’t know what I was saying [...] after I was arrested, I was turned into a radical boy [...] I was with a movement that believed in doing radical things, [a movement] that lived in war and not in peace [...] That was a reaction to the violence that we were subjected to that created new people.’*”

# A THIRD STORY

**In our research, we found that there actually is a third story in WB. This option is less vocal, less expressive, certainly less visible. It is in some ways the hidden story of the regular citizen of WB who does not openly discuss the conflict so as not to get in trouble. We label this story the “middle ground”.**

## NARRATIVE 3: THE MIDDLE GROUND

**While historically Morocco may or may not have had a right to take control over the Western Sahara, the fact is that Morocco rules over WB and has done so for a long time. Morocco has invested a lot, and is still investing a lot, in the development of the area. Through financial government support, commodities like food and drinks are cheaper in WB than in (North) Morocco, and some Sahrawi receive a monthly sum from the state. There is much less poverty in WB than in (North) Morocco, much less crime, and no children live in the street.**

**While the Sahrawi and the Moroccan people are different people with different cultural backgrounds, they mix in everyday life on a daily basis. They work together, go to school together, they may be friends, neighbours. The Sahrawi are also integrated in the state system by taking up government positions, as well as working for the Moroccan security forces. When you see young people, you cannot even see the difference between Sahrawi and Moroccan.**

**There is space for Sahrawi culture in WB, for example because Sahrawi wear traditional clothing, sleep in the desert, some live in the desert full-time. The Sahrawi culture is even used as a tourist attraction.**

**Moroccan violation of human rights used to be much worse under King Hassan II, yet this got somewhat better during the last decade under the rule of his son, King Mohammed VI. Morocco is modernizing and there is more respect for human rights, yet it is not perfect. The problems that exist are not between the Sahrawi and Moroccan people that live in WB, but between pro-independence Sahrawi activist and the Moroccan authorities.**

**Over the recent years there have been several violent clashes between these two groups, such as the clashes related to the Gdeim Izik protest camps and the celebration of Algeria winning the Africa Cup (2019). Clashes like these result in casualties on both sides.**

It seemed to us that our respondents who are not activists, mostly want to live a normal life, free from conflict. For example:

**INTERVIEW 38 (ONLINE)**  
A 18-24 year old Sahrawi

“*I don’t care about Moroccan/Sahrawi. My family identifies as Sahrawi. I’m part of it by blood, but I find this system a bit stupid.*”



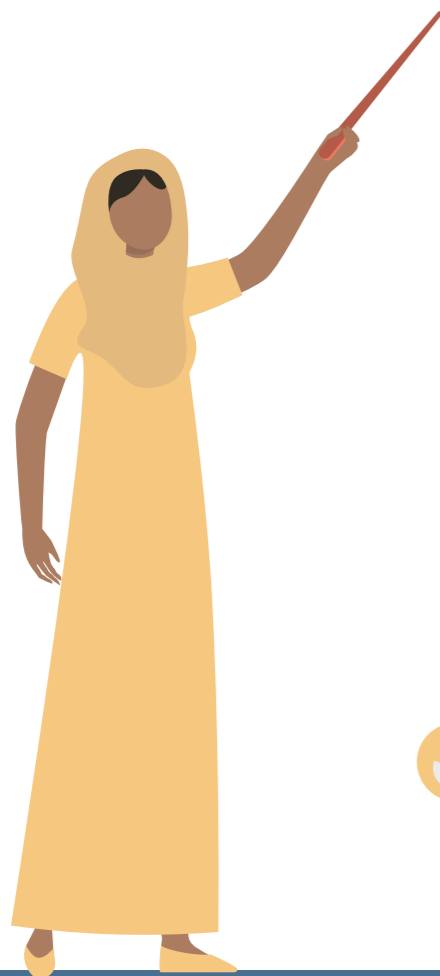


# WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you think that it is important that children should grow up not being scared to share their thoughts, there are ways in which you can help. Maybe you are a parent, and you can give your children some more space to develop their thoughts in freedom. Maybe you are a teacher, and you can give your students the space to explore different arguments. Maybe you are a policeman and you decide to let children break the taboos, because they are children. Maybe you are a politician and you decide to change the law so that children can live in your country free from fear. Here are some practical steps you could take to realize the child's right to freedom of expression:

## PARENTS

As parents, you can create a safe environment in your home, a safe space where your children can share their thoughts, ask questions and are not judged for their thoughts. If children have a right to freedom of expression, they are not obliged to think or say the same things as their parents. They can have their own ideas.



As Khalil Gibran wrote in his book "The Prophet":

*Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's  
longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you,  
And though they are with you yet they belong  
not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts,  
For they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls,  
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them, but seek not to  
make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.  
You are the bows from which your children as living  
arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the  
infinite, and He bends you with His might that His  
arrows may go swift and far.  
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for  
gladness;  
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves  
also the bow that is stable.*



## TEACHERS / SCHOOL DIRECTORS

Schools can set up rules that protect the child's right to freedom of expression while they are in school. Concretely, these rules can include statements on:

- Whether or not it is mandatory to sing the national anthem in the morning
- Dress rules (is traditional Sahrawi clothing allowed?)
- Whether or not societal taboos (King, Western Sahara, Islam, sexuality) can be discussed in class
- How both students and teachers who discuss these subjects in class are protected from any consequences if they share their thoughts
- Under what circumstances student protest is allowed

Teachers have an opportunity to familiarize students with the meaning of the right to freedom of expression. They can do so by teaching what this right means, but also by practicing this right in the classroom. This means: creating a safe space where students can share their thoughts, without suffering any consequences. It also means presenting different perspectives on certain subjects. A possible way to practice this in a safe way, is by giving students the assignment to make arguments from a certain perspective. For example, to ask the students how they would feel about a certain subject if they were a Christian instead of a Muslim, or a Sahrawi instead of a Moroccan, or a boy instead of a girl. It can also help to invite people into the classroom who have different perspectives on a certain subject. Of course, the extent to which this is possible and safe for the teacher is a matter of personal consideration, perhaps decided in conversation with the school director.



## WB COMMUNITY

To protect the child's right to freedom of expression in WB, it would help if all community members reflected on what their role is in limiting the freedom of expression of children in WB. What kind of society would you like to live in? One where children can share their thoughts freely, or one where they have to be silent and just repeat what their parents tell them to say? One where children have to be afraid not to say the wrong thing, or one where they can be carefree? If you prefer the latter, then realize that how you treat children and what they say makes a difference. You don't have to agree with what they say, to allow them to say it.

Also realize that you yourself were most likely also brought up in a society where you had to be afraid to share your thoughts, and if you grew up in WB your thoughts and identity were probably influenced by the dominant narratives. Some of the thoughts that you have about freedom of expression for children will have been influenced by your upbringing and education. You can decide, now that you become aware, if this is indeed how you want children in your society to grow up.





## MOROCCAN KING AND GOVERNMENT

**There is a lot that the Moroccan King and government can do to better protect the child's right to freedom of expression in WB (and in Morocco at large):**

### Change the law

Morocco should change its national law to better protect the child's right to freedom of expression, so that it aligns with international law. In particular:

- Adjust the list of forbidden expressions to align with international law:
  - Allow for criticism of the King and his family ("hate speech" however is not allowed)
  - Allow for speaking freely about, and questioning, religion
  - Allow for discussion of the Western Sahara conflict from different perspectives and for peaceful protest. The only exception here can be expressions that intend to incite imminent violence, if it is likely that such violence will result directly from the expression
  - Allow for the use, drawing, showing and sharing of the Sahrawi flag
- Adjust enforcement measures to be proportionate to the offence (violence by law enforcement is not allowed, unless absolutely necessary and kept to a minimum)
- Specify the child's right to freedom of expression, and the ways in which this is similar and/or different from an adult's right to freedom of expression, in domestic law

### Change policy

- Draft a guideline on how to have a free and open dialogue about the Western Sahara issue, that is freely available to all

- Inform and train the police about how to engage with children and adults who may transgress legal limitations to freedom of expression (what are the limitations, how to respond)
- Provide clarity regarding what is expected of schools/teachers regarding the realization of the child's right to freedom of expression in schools

### Lead by example

- Enter into discussions with people who have different opinions on the taboo issues. You do not have to agree with them, the important thing is that you show that even people you disagree with have a right to be heard
- Stop the prosecution of people on the basis of their ideas
- Make a public statement to indicate that Morocco is changing to a modern democracy that respects human rights, and that this includes allowing its people to criticize the King and its government, to question religion, to openly discuss forms of sexuality and to openly discuss the Western Sahara conflict

## MOROCCAN POLICE, SECRET POLICE AND MILITARY

- Change the way in which you deal with children who transgress the limitations on freedom of expression
- Stop harassing and intimidating children





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