

B R A H I M D A H A N E

*In recognition of having demonstrated unwavering personal courage, employed peaceful means and risked his life in the struggle for human rights during the conflict between Morocco and Western Sahara, Brahim Dahane is hereby awarded the 2009 Per Anger Prize.*

Mr Dahane has operated in an environment of political chaos. Western Sahara has not been free since Spain colonised it in 1884. It was invaded by Mauritania and Morocco after Spain pulled out in 1975. Morocco still occupies Western Sahara and exploits its natural resources. In 2005 the EU and Morocco signed a fishing agreement governing Western Sahara territorial waters. Citing international rights concerns, Sweden voted against the agreement. The UN has declared that the Western Saharans are entitled to self-determination. A 2,700 kilometre-long mined berm (sand wall) runs through the territory and serves as a separation barrier. In the wake of the occupation, a large percentage of the Western Saharan population has fled to Mauritanian and Algerian refugee camps.

Mr Dahane has taken a steadfast, long-term approach that strictly adheres to the principles of nonviolence. He played a decisive role in the establishment of two human rights organisations: Association Sahraouie des Victimes des Violations Graves des Droits de l'Homme (ASVDH) and a committee that searches for disappeared persons. ASVDH, which was among the first human rights groups willing to operate openly in the occupied territory, lends a voice to Western Saharan victims of torture, disappearance and abuse. Occupation forces regularly harass and arrest its members.

Mr Dahane has long worked to forge close relationships with the press and human rights groups around the world. In an effort to penetrate the wall of silence that surrounds Western Sahara, he has arranged for a number of commissioners to visit the occupied territory. He also teaches other Western Saharans how they can use the Internet as a way of telling the world about the abuse and injustice they have suffered.

As a result of his dedication to the cause of freedom and human rights, Mr Dahane has been tortured and incarcerated at both prisons and secret POW camps.