Amazigh Movement Loses Emblematic Activist and Lawyer Ahmed Adghirni

By Yahia Hatim
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On Monday, October 19, Morocco's Amazigh movement lost one of its most emblematic figures: Ahmed Adghirni. The Moroccan writer, lawyer, politician, and activist died at the age of 73 after a six-year battle with Parkinson's disease.

A strong defender of the Amazigh people's struggle for official recognition in North Africa and beyond, Adghirni left a remarkable legacy behind him.

After Adghirni's death, Amazigh activists in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and France, among other countries, mourned the Moroccan activist's passing on social media and recollected his numerous contributions to the Amazigh cause.

Cultivated lawyer

Ahmed Adghirni was born on May 5, 1947, in the small village of Taddart, near Agadir. With his father working as a teacher and as a judge, Adghirni was familiar with legal professions from a young age.

The future lawyer studied in several towns in Morocco's Souss region, including Tiznit and Taroudant. As a teenager, Adghirni went to study in Marrakech where he earned his baccalaureate diploma from Sidi Youssef Ben Ali High School.

The activist then enrolled in Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, where he earned a degree in law. He achieved a similar diploma a few years later, at the Mohammed V University in Rabat.

During his time at the university, which coincided with the period that historians refer to as Morocco's "years of lead," Adghirni developed a sense of sympathy with activists and decided to defend political detainees after his graduation.

Adghirni began practicing as a lawyer in the early 1970s. He first worked in Sidi Slimane, near Kenitra, and then in Rabat. Throughout his nearly 50-year career, the Moroccan lawyer defended numerous Amazigh activists in court. Notably, these included the leader of the Hirak Rif movement, Nasser Zefzafi.

Influential activist

On the international level, Ahmed Adghirni, also known as Dda Hmad, is one of the founding members of the World Amazigh Congress. Established in 1995, the umbrella organization works with NGOs defending Amazigh rights from across the world.

Adghirni participated in conferences about Amazigh identity in Italy, France, Spain, the Netherlands, Algeria, and Libya. He also had close ties with organizations and activists from Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and the Canary Islands.

Dda Hmad significantly contributed to raising awareness about Amazigh identity internationally, without affiliation to any formal body. As Mounir Kejji, one of Adghirni's closest friends, put it: "Adghirni was an institution on his own."

"Dda Hmad is a precursor of Amazigh identitarian awareness," Kejji, who knew Adghirni for over 25 years, told Morocco World News.

Bilingual writer

When not defending or raising awareness about the rights of Amazigh people, Ahmed Adghirni liked to write.

During his life, he published more than 20 books, in Arabic and Tamazight, tackling the fields of history, politics, translation, and literature, in addition to dozens of pieces in newspapers and magazines.

Some of Adghirni's most famous works are a Tamazight translation of William Shakespeare's play "Romeo and Juliet," as well as a book documenting the 2016-2017 Hirak Rif movement. The latter was the first book published on the social protests, and Adghirni wrote it while battling Parkinson's.

Dda Hmad also founded two regular publications: Amezday and Tamazight. Amezday, which means "links" in Tamazight, was a magazine aimed at promoting Amazigh identity. Meanwhile, Tamazight was a weekly newspaper that reported issues that primarily concern Amazigh people.

Regularly invited to conferences and public events across Morocco, Adghirni was a well-respected speaker and lecturer. The public knew him for his direct and honest speech, as well as his pertinent political analyses.

"The frankness of his statements made them sometimes subject to controversy, especially because he had many opponents in Morocco's political sphere. But, nonetheless, he was a well-respected man," Kejji said.

After living in Rabat for many years, Adghirni returned to his hometown in the Atlas Mountains in July 2020. In precognition of his own passing, Dda Hmad wanted to fulfill his last wish and spend his remaining days in the town where he grew up.

Ahmed Adghirni is survived by two sons and an imperishable legacy of activism.