

Freedom of expression for Moroccan human rights activists

Seven members of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (Association Marocaine des Droits Humains, AMDH) were arrested by the police after participating in peaceful demonstrations on 1 May, during which slogans criticising the country's monarchy were chanted.

Five men arrested in the city of Ksar el Kebir, Thami Khyati, Youssef Reggab, Oussama Ben Messaoud, Ahmed Al Kaateb and Rabii Raïssouni, were charged and found guilty of “undermining the monarchy”. They were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment and heavy fines. At the trial, they were reportedly not allowed to call defence witnesses. On 24 July, a court of appeal sentenced them to one more year in prison, extending their prison sentence from three to four years.

Two more men, 19-year-old Mehdi Berbouchi and 25 year-old Abderrahim Karrad, were also charged with offences relating to “undermining the monarchy” and sentenced to two years’ imprisonment and a heavy fine by a court in the city of Agadir.

On 5 and 6 June, 10 AMDH members were arrested in the city of Beni Mellal after participating in a sit-in in solidarity with the seven detainees named above and later charged with “undermining the monarchy”. Six of them were acquitted at a trial on 26 June. However, 72 year-old political activist Mohamed Boughrine was sentenced to one year in prison and a heavy fine, and Abdelkbir Rabaoui, Brahim Ahansal and Mohamed Yousfi received two-month suspended prison sentences and were each fined 500 dirhams. On 9 August, after an appeal by the prosecution, the 10 men received harsher sentences, with Mohamed Boughrine sentenced to three years imprisonment and the nine others to one year imprisonment. The nine remain at liberty pending examination by a higher court.

A sit-in of the AMDH organised on 15 June in solidarity with its detained members was forcibly dispersed by the Moroccan Auxiliary forces. Just before 6pm, members of the Auxiliary Forces surrounded the participants gathered in front of the Parliament in Rabat, the capital city, and started to push and beat them with batons before the sit-in started. They gave no advance warning of their action and did not order to the participants to disperse before resorting to the use of force. Some 30 participants were injured by the Auxiliary Forces, including one whose wrist was broken and another who had his eardrum pierced. Long-standing human rights defenders Khadija Ryadi, President of the AMDH, and Abdelhamid Amine, its Vice-President, were also beaten.

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the eight men sentenced to prison solely for having participated in peaceful demonstrations, during which opinions were expressed peacefully. Amnesty International is concerned that their trials may have been unfair and is calling for a



Khadija Ryadi, President of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights
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thorough investigation into the claims that two of the prisoners were threatened and ill-treated during arrest and interrogation in Agadir.

Amnesty International is also calling for a full, independent and impartial investigation into the conduct of the Auxiliary Forces at the AMDH sit-in on 15 June and for appropriate disciplinary or other action against anyone found to have used excessive force.

Take action!

Please send appeals to the Minister of Justice to ensure that the rights to freedom of expression and assembly of human rights activists are upheld.

[Text of appeal]

Your Excellency,

I am writing to you to express my concern that, since 1 May 2007, 17 members of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights have been convicted of “undermining the monarchy”, solely for having participated in peaceful demonstrations during which opinions were expressed in a peaceful manner. They have only exercised their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly, enshrined in the Moroccan Constitution and in Articles 19 and 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a state party.

I am urging you to quash all prison sentences and fines against them. In particular, I am urging you to release immediately and unconditionally prisoners of conscience Mehdi Berbouchi, Abderrahim Karrad, Thami Khyati, Youssef Reggab, Oussama Ben Messaoud, Ahmed Al Kaateb, Rabii Raïssouni and Mohamed Boughrine.

I am concerned that two of the men named above alleged being threatened and ill-treated during arrest and interrogation. I am urging you to allow a full investigation into these claims and to disclose its outcome.

I am further alarmed at the violent dispersal by the Moroccan Auxiliary forces of a sit-in by the Moroccan Association for Human Rights on 15 June, intended to express solidarity with its imprisoned members. The Auxiliary forces started to push demonstrators and beat them with batons, without giving them advance warning, as is required by the Moroccan Code on Public Liberties. Some 30 participants have reportedly been injured, including two seriously, indicating that some members of the Auxiliary Forces used excessive force.

I am urging you to establish an independent and impartial investigation into the conduct of the Auxiliary forces when dispersing the sit-in planned for 15 June, in order to establish whether excessive force was used, and to make the full findings public. Such inquiry should, in the case that it concludes that excessive force was used, make recommendations regarding appropriate disciplinary or other action against those responsible, compensation for those injured and measures to prevent any recurrence of such use of excessive force by the Auxiliary Forces.

Yours sincerely,

