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Lebanon: Blasphemy charges against musician Marcel Khalife must be dropped

Amnesty International is urging the Lebanese authorities to respect the right to freedom of expression and drop charges of 'insulting' Islam lodged against popular Lebanese musician Marcel Khalife.

Marcel Khalife is scheduled to appear before the Beirut Court of First Instance on 3 November 1999. The blasphemy charge relates to a song based on a poem by the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish, called "I am Yusuf" which is inspired by the story of Yusuf (Joseph) and his brothers which quotes a verse from the Qur'an.

According to the Lebanese Penal Code, blasphemy is punishable by three to six years' imprisonment. Some 50 lawyers have volunteered to defend the musician and thousands of people and organizations, including the Lebanese Bar Association, have signed petitions calling for legal proceedings against Marcel Khalife to be dropped.

Amnesty International believes that bringing Marcel Khalife to trial is a gross infringement of his right to freedom of expression and a violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Lebanon is a state party as well as the Lebanese Constitution which guarantees freedom of opinion.

“This is the second time in three years that Marcel Khalife has been accused of blaspheming Islam for singing the same song,” Amnesty International said. “The Lebanese government must uphold freedom of expression and allow Mr Khalife to exercise, freely and without fear, his right to freedom of expression and opinion.”

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on

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