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Morocco/Western Sahara: Jailed for reporting torture

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate and unconditional release of 22-year-old Oussama Housne ahead of his appeal hearing on 17 February in Casablanca for an alleged false torture report and slander, after daring to file a complaint for abduction and torture.

The young activist, who is a member of the 20 February Movement (*Mouvement 20 février*) and the Moroccan Human Rights Association (*Association marocaine des droits humains - AMDH*), is currently serving a three-year prison sentence in Oukacha local prison. On 23 July 2014, he was convicted for falsely reporting an offence and providing a false torture testimony. The court also ordered him to pay 100,000 dirhams (about USD 12,000) in damages to the Moroccan police for having made a false allegation against them even though he had not accused Moroccan security forces.

Oussama Housne claimed that he had been abducted and assaulted by unknown individuals on 2 May 2014 as he was leaving a protest in solidarity with activists from the 20 February Movement who had been arrested following a trade union demonstration in Casablanca. The authorities had initially investigated his allegations before deciding to prosecute him.

Wafaa Charaf, 27, is also currently serving a two-year prison sentence after filing a complaint against X for abduction and torture as she was leaving a workers' protest in Tangier in April 2014. The young woman, who is a member of AMDH as well as of the Democratic Path party (*La voie démocratique*), was convicted for falsely reporting an offence, giving a false testimony and slander on 12 August 2014. The court also ordered her to pay 50,000 dirhams (about USD 6,000) in damages to the Moroccan police for slander, even though she did not accuse them. Amnesty International is calling for her immediate and unconditional release.

Complaints of torture, even if wrong or exaggerated, should never be criminalized. No one should be imprisoned for reporting torture. On the contrary, for the fight against torture to be effective, there needs to be a climate in which victims and witnesses can report violations without fear of reprisal.

The actions of the Moroccan authorities against Oussama Housne and Wafaa Charaf, as well as the recent criminal proceedings brought by Morocco against Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) for "defamation, contempt for corporate bodies, use of manoeuvres and fraud to incite the making of false testimonies, complicity and public insult" after ACAT in France had filed several complaints against Moroccan public officials alleging torture, have set serious precedents and call into question whether the Moroccan authorities are genuinely determined to eradicate torture and ill-treatment.

The 20 February Movement, named after the demonstrations which swept Morocco on 20 February 2011, calls for respect for human rights, democratization, social justice and an end to corruption.