

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# Morocco: Authorities must drop any spurious charges against independent journalist Omar Radi

Following weeks of harassment by the Moroccan authorities, the Prosecutor of the Court of First Instance in Casablanca charged Omar Radi, an investigative journalist, with harming national security and rape on 29 July.

The escalation comes after Amnesty International published a report<sup>1</sup> on 22 June revealing how the Moroccan government had targeted Omar Radi's phone with spyware from NSO Group.

Amnesty International has serious concerns that these new accusations are trumped-up charges meant to harass Omar Radi, smear his reputation and silence him. His ongoing harassment underscores the threats activists and journalists in Morocco face for exposing human rights violations.

Allegations of sexual violence should always be taken very seriously. At the same time, Moroccan authorities have been levelling sexual crimes accusations as a tactics to prosecute journalists and human rights activists. The authorities must drop any spurious charges against Radi, impartially and thoroughly investigate any complaints against him and guarantee his due process rights.

### Background

Omar Radi has been systematically targeted by the Moroccan authorities due to his journalism and activism. He is a vocal critic of the government's human rights record and has reported on corruption as well as links between corporate and political interests in Morocco. On 17 March 2020, he was handed a suspended four-month prison term for a tweet he posted in April 2019 criticizing the unfair trial of a group of activists.

Two days after the release of an Amnesty International report exposing the spyware attack targeting Omar Radi's phone, the judicial police in Casablanca summoned Radi for the first time for interrogation on 24 June. He was later summoned eight more times and interrogated for hours each time, initially only on accusations related to suspicion of foreign funding linked to intelligence groups. The rape charge was introduced following a complaint made by an alleged victim, who accused Radi of assaulting her the night of 12 July. In a statement released on 30 July<sup>2</sup>, Radi denied such accusations, affirming that he had a "consensual sexual relationship" with the plaintiff, and warned that the accusations were trumped-up charges to punish him for his journalistic work.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International Report " Moroccan Journalist Targeted With Network Injection Attacks Using NSO Group's Tools", 22 June 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2020/06/moroccan-journalist-targeted-with-network-injection-attacks-using-nso-groups-tools/>

<sup>2</sup> Facebook post, [https://www.facebook.com/freeomarradi/posts/181074020067805?\\_\\_tn\\_\\_=-R](https://www.facebook.com/freeomarradi/posts/181074020067805?__tn__=-R)

On 29 July, the Office of the Prosecutor of the Appeals Court in Casablanca issued a statement announcing that Omar Radi was charged with "sexual assault", "rape", "undermining external state security by maintaining relations with agents of a foreign authorities to harm Morocco's military and diplomatic situation" and "harming internal security", by receiving foreign funds that could "prejudice the integrity, sovereignty or independence of the Kingdom or shake the allegiance of citizens towards the State and Moroccan peoples' institutions," under articles 485, 486, 191 and 206 respectively of the Penal Code. His trial for these charges is scheduled for 22 September.

In parallel to the summoning of Omar Radi, the Moroccan authorities launched a smear campaign against Amnesty International<sup>3</sup>, in a clear attempt to discredit the organization's findings and distract from the unlawful surveillance in Morocco of human rights defenders and journalists.

In 2019, a Moroccan court of appeal sentenced Taoufik Bouachrine, publisher of Akhbar el-Youm, one of the country's last opposition newspapers, to 15 years in prison. In its opinion about this case, the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention concluded that his trial was marred by due-process violations and considered that Bouachrine's arbitrary detention forms part of a "judicial harassment attributable to nothing other than his investigative journalism<sup>4</sup>."

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<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, Morocco and Western Sahara: Government smear campaign against Amnesty International underlines intolerance of scrutiny, 4 July 2020.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its eighty-third session, 19–23 November 2018, Opinion No. 85/2018 concerning Toufik Bouachrine, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/020/29/PDF/G1902029.pdf?OpenElement> (Morocco)