

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED JOURNALIST FACING TRIAL

On 23 March, an investigative judge set 6 April as the first trial date for Moroccan investigative journalist and vocal critic Omar Radi, who has been held in pre-trial detention for nine months in Oukacha prison in Casablanca. He will face charges of “harming the national security of the state” and rape. Omar Radi, who frequently criticised the government’s human rights record, was arrested in July 2020. Amnesty International had revealed in a [report](#) that the Moroccan authorities targeted him through illegal surveillance using a spyware produced by NSO Group, an Israeli company.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Head of Government Saad Dine El-Othmani
 Palais Royal Touarga, Rabat 10070, Morocco
 Fax: +212 53 7771010
 Twitter: @ChefGov_ma

Your Excellency,

*I am writing to renew my call for the release from pre-trial detention and fair trial for journalist **Omar Radi** who has been detained in pre-trial detention since 29 July 2020 and who is facing his first trial session on 6 April 2021.*

On 23 March 2021, an investigative judge indicted him for “harming the internal and external security of Morocco” based on an accusation that he had received funds from sources “linked to foreign intelligence agencies”. Amnesty International has found that Omar Radi has received funds transferred from abroad for research grants in the context of a journalism fellowship and freelance consultancies, both related to his exercise of freedom of expression. Amnesty International therefore has serious concerns that the charge is spurious and indicates a similar pattern used by the Moroccan authorities to intimidate critics. Similar charges were brought against academic Maati Monjib for legitimately receiving funding from a foreign non-governmental organization in 2015.

Omar Radi is also charged with “rape” and “indecent assault against a female” based on an accusation by a woman who alleges he assaulted her on 12 July 2020. He denies this, affirming that he had a “consensual sexual relationship” with her. The witness in this case, journalist Imad Stitou, who was present during the alleged incident, has denied throughout the investigation that rape took place. As a result Imad Stitou has also been indicted as an accomplice of rape. He is facing trial on the same date.

Rape accusations must each be considered on their merits and Amnesty International is not well placed to assess their veracity. We note that there has been a recent pattern of sexual assault charges being brought against critics of the government in the context of detention or prosecutions related to their freedom of expression. In one case of a detained newspaper publisher, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found that his detention in relation to rape accusations amounted to “judicial harassment attributable to nothing other than his investigative journalism”.

I urge the Moroccan authorities to release Omar Radi while he awaits and undergoes trial. Under international law, pretrial detention should only be used as an exceptional measure and only when the authorities can demonstrate a specific risk of, for example, absconding. Omar Radi is already under a travel ban and has pledged to participate fully in the judicial process. I also call on you to drop the “national security” charge against Omar Radi as it is related to his legitimate exercise of journalistic work. Finally, I call on the authorities to grant Omar Radi a fair trial in accordance with international due process standards.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Omar Radi is an investigative journalist and activist from Morocco. He is a founder of and journalist at [Le Desk](#), an independent Moroccan news website that publishes content critical of the authorities. He has worked with several national and international media outlets, including radio station Atlantic Radio, magazines *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and *TelQuel* and news website *Lakome*. His investigations have focused on political affairs, including the relations between political powers and business elites in Morocco and investigating corruption by the authorities. In 2013, he won the first investigative journalism award of International Media Support (IMS) and the Association of Moroccan Investigative Journalists (AMJI) for an investigation into the exploitation of sand quarries published on Lakome. In 2016, he was the author of an investigation report widely known as "Servants of the State" in which he listed the names of around 100 senior officials alleged to have illegally acquired state land."

Prior to his detention, Omar Radi was questioned seven times by the Central Bureau for Judicial Investigations in Casablanca. The first session, on 25 June 2020, lasted for more than five hours; the interrogators accused him of obtaining funds from sources linked to foreign intelligence agencies. He was summoned for questioning six further times on 2, 9, 13, 17, 20 and 25 July 2020. The Office of the Prosecutor of the First Instance Court in Casablanca charged Omar Radi 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 people's institutions," under Articles 485, 486, 191 and 206 respectively of the Penal Code. His trial on these charges started on 22 September 2020.

Omar Radi's targeting by the Moroccan authorities is not new. [On 17 March 2020](#), a court in Morocco handed Omar Radi a suspended four-month prison sentence and a fine of 500 Moroccan dirhams (US\$52) for a [tweet](#) in which he criticized an appeal court judge for upholding heavy prison sentences against [Hirak El-Rif](#) activists. Omar Radi has previously been subjected to legal harassment. In 2016-17, he covered protests by Hirak El-Rif, a social movement demanding socioeconomic rights for the marginalized Rif region in northern Morocco. In 2018, he co-directed a documentary called [Death Over Humiliation](#), about events related to Hirak El-Rif in the province of Al Hoceima.

In a separate case, on 4 July 2020, Omar Radi and fellow journalist Imed Stitou, were arrested and kept in custody for 48 hours. Two days later, they were brought before the prosecutor of a court in the Casablanca district of Aïn Sebaâ on charges of "public drunkenness" and "violence." On the same day, the court referred them to trial, scheduled the first hearing for 24 September and ordered their release in the meantime. Omar Radi has said that had been followed on the street by a journalist from Chouf TV, a TV station supportive of the government, who had provoked them into an altercation. After 6 postponed hearings, a new one was scheduled for 1 April 2021.

In June 2020, an Amnesty International report revealed that Omar Radi was targeted by the Moroccan authorities using spyware produced by NSO Group, an Israeli company. Following its publication, the Moroccan authorities launched a smear campaign against Amnesty International, in an attempt to discredit the organization's findings and distract from the unlawful surveillance in Morocco of human rights defenders and journalists. In October 2019 Amnesty International had published a report presenting evidence Moroccan human rights defenders [Maati Monjib](#) and Abdessadak El Bouchattaoui had similarly been targeted by surveillance technology produced by the company NSO Group. Amnesty International has underlined the gravity of the threat that unlawful targeted surveillance poses to the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Morocco.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 JUNE 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Omar Radi (He/his/him)