



The Freedom Initiative



CSO JOINT CALL TO MOROCCAN AUTHORITIES:

RELEASE OMAR RADI AND GUARANTEE FAIR TRIAL PROCEEDINGS

As the trial of award-winning journalist and human rights activist Omar Radi is set to begin in Morocco on April 6, 2021, the undersigned organizations call on Moroccan authorities to grant him provisional release and guarantee fair trial proceedings for all parties.

The trial opens in a context where what remains of press freedom in Morocco is under siege, and those who dare to publicly criticize the increasingly repressive regime face prosecution on dubious charges and slander campaigns by media closely aligned with the authorities. Amid these attacks, *Akhbar al-Yaoum*, one of the last independent newspapers in the country, [ended its operations after 14 years](#).

Moroccan authorities have held Mr. Radi in pretrial detention since July 29, 2020, without once providing him with a credible and individualized justification for depriving him of his liberty, in defiance of international norms. We further call on other states to raise Mr. Radi's case with Morocco at the highest level, and press Moroccan authorities to ensure that no defendant is detained pretrial except on the basis of compelling reasons that are spelled out and reviewed regularly by an independent judicial body. Detention before trial should be the exception, not the rule.

On March 23, 2021, an examining magistrate finished his investigation into charges against Mr. Radi that include undermining state security and rape. Mr. Radi will face trial on both charges. The national security charges against Mr. Radi appear to be based on nothing more than the kind of journalistic or corporate due diligence work and contact with diplomats that many journalists and researchers engage in routinely. [The case file includes no evidence](#) that he provided classified information to anyone, or even had access to such information.

Authorities filed the charges against Mr. Radi shortly after Amnesty International published a [report](#) alleging that Mr. Radi's phone had been repeatedly targeted with sophisticated spyware, and after months of articles attacking Mr. Radi on websites believed to be closely tied to security services. The rape charge against Mr. Radi stems from an incident that took place on the night of July 12, 2020. A colleague said that Mr. Radi raped her, while he claims their encounter that night was consensual.

We affirm the imperative duty to thoroughly investigate and hold to account perpetrators of sexual assault. We are also concerned that the accusation against Mr. Radi occurs in a context where several independent journalists, activists, and politicians have been [arrested, tried, or imprisoned on questionable charges of sexual misconduct](#) in the past few years. Khmissa, a Moroccan feminist collective

that calls for defending both women's rights and political freedoms, recently [warned](#) about the weaponization of sexual crime accusations by authorities, including consensual sexual relations, in order to discredit and even imprison dissidents.

In addition, the authorities accused Moroccan journalist Imad Stitou of "complicity" in the rape, after he provided testimony as the sole person to witness the alleged incident, corroborating Mr. Radi's version of events. By charging Mr. Stitou, authorities have in effect nullified the evidentiary value of his testimony as a defense witness. The court must render its verdict on the basis of a careful and fair consideration of all relevant evidence, and enable those charged with crimes all adequate means to defend themselves.

A free and independent press is critical to healthy governance and state-society relations, as much as fair judicial proceedings are critical to ensuring justice, particularly for alleged sexual abuses.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

CIVICUS

Committee to Protect Journalists

FIDH, in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Freedom House

Human Rights Watch

International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)

Khmissa

MENA Rights Group

Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH)

PEN America

Project on Middle East Democracy

The Freedom Initiative

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders