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Tunisia: Persepolis trial spotlights attacks on freedom of expression

Charges against a TV boss who screened the French film Persepolis should be dropped by the Tunisian authorities, Amnesty International said ahead of the resumption of his trial.

The trial of Nabil Karoui, the owner of the Nessma TV channel, is expected to restart on Thursday after it was adjourned in January.

He faces charges of “violating sacred values” and “disturbing the public order” after his station broadcast the animated film, which has been criticized as blasphemous because of a scene which shows a representation of God.

If convicted, Nabil Karoui faces up to three years in prison.

“At a time when we are looking to the Tunisian government to set an example by enshrining full respect for human rights in the country’s new constitution, it is disturbing to see this trial continuing,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme.

“Prosecuting and convicting people on the basis of the peaceful expression of their views, even if some might find them offensive, is totally unacceptable and not what we would expect from the new Tunisia. It’s reminiscent of the violations of the ousted Ben Ali government and must stop.”

Nabil Karoui has been charged under Article 48 of the old Press Code and Article 121(3) of the Penal Code relating to spreading information “that can harm public order or good morals.”

Persepolis, an award-winning film on Iran’s 1979 revolution told from the perspective of a young girl, provoked angry reactions when Nessma TV aired a version translated into Tunisian dialect in October 2011 .

The home of Nabil Karoui was firebombed on 14 October following a protest outside the Nessma TV offices in central Tunis. Salafist activists are believed to have carried out the attack. He filed a complaint but to date Amnesty International is not aware that anyone has been held to account.

Public Document

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