

URGENT ACTION

ACADEMIC ARBITRARILY DETAINED

On 29 December 2020, Moroccan academic and human rights defender Maati Monjib was arrested while having lunch at a restaurant in the capital Rabat and held in arbitrary detention since then. He had been under a new investigation since 7 October 2020 on accusations of money laundering against him and members of his family. The investigation is the latest attempt to intimidate Maati Monjib and retaliate against him for his critical stance towards the authorities and his work promoting the right to freedom of expression in Morocco following years of harassment and unlawful surveillance. Maati Monjib is a prisoner of conscience. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

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 urgently condemn the authorities' arrest and arbitrary detention of academic and human rights defender **Maati Monjib** on 29 December 2020. Security agents in civilian clothes took him by force and without prior notification from a restaurant in the capital Rabat to the court of First Instance in Rabat, where he was brought before the prosecutor. The latter referred him to the investigating judge, who, after interrogating him without the presence of a lawyer, ordered his pretrial detention.*

On 7 October 2020, the prosecutor's office at the Rabat Court of First Instance, following a referral from the Financial Information Processing Unit, opened a new investigation against Maati Monjib for alleged embezzlement and money laundering apparently stemming from the receipt of foreign funds to conduct training workshops for citizen journalists. Maati Monjib told Amnesty International that this renewed harassment and intimidation are due to a recent radio interview where he criticised the General Directorate of Territorial Surveillance (DGST, internal intelligence) for their repression of political opponents as well as his open support to detained journalists Omar Radi and Suleiman Raissouni.

The Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (better known as BNPJ) has over the past months summoned Maati Monjib more than seven times for interrogation in Casablanca and in Rabat. Four members of his family, with no relation to political activism, were also summoned, including his 70-year-old sister who has Alzheimer's and had to travel to Casablanca, hours away from her home, to be interrogated for more than four hours. Maati Monjib denies all accusations against him.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Maati Monjib, as he is a prisoner of conscience solely detained for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association. I urge you to close the open investigations and drop all charges against him. I also urge you to explicitly recognize the legitimacy of human rights defenders and publicly support their work, acknowledging their contribution to the advancement of human rights and to end the criminalization of their receipt of foreign funds to pursue their human rights work.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Maati Monjib is an academic and founder of the Ibn Rochd Center for Studies and Communication, president of the non-profit organization Freedom Now (which he founded jointly with journalist Ali Anouzla) and a member of the Moroccan Association for Investigative Journalism (AMJI). He is also a regular commentator on Moroccan politics in international media, think tanks and academic forums where he often shared opinions and analysis about the Moroccan authorities' infringement of human rights. On 26 October 2020, Maati Monjib travelled four hours from his place of residence to respond to one of the summons he received. He had to take public transportation which exposed him to the risk of COVID19, which he contracted and had to self-quarantine after the trip. He was subsequently summoned on 25 November and 4 December 2020.

In 2015, Maati Monjib was banned from travelling to Spain where he was scheduled to give a talk at a conference about Arab media in transition. Maati Monjib began a 24-days hunger strike to protest the travel ban. His health deteriorated significantly during the hunger strike and he was hospitalized after losing consciousness. The authorities subsequently lifted the travel ban on 29 October 2015.

Maati Monjib and six other activists were investigated in 2015 under accusations of "threatening the internal security of the state" through "propaganda" that may threaten "the loyalty that citizens owe to the State and institutions of the Moroccan people" under Article 206 of the Penal Code, as well as "*fraud*" under Article 540 and "*leading an association exercising an activity non-compliant to those set out in its status*" under Royal Decree 1.58.376 regulating the Law on Associations. In the 2015 case against Maati Monjib and his six co-defendants, the police interrogation revolved around their receipt of foreign funds from the NGO Free Press Unlimited to conduct training sessions around the technique of StoryMaker, a secure storytelling app developed by Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Guardian Project and Small World News, which enables citizen journalists to publish content anonymously if they wish to. The trial is ongoing in this case since 2015. According to Maati Monjib, his trial sessions usually last four or five minutes before the judge adjourns and announces the next hearing date. It has been postponed 21 time since 2015. Maati Monjib could be imprisoned for up to five years if found guilty in this case.

In a letter sent to Amnesty International, the government mentioned that the reasons for the new 2020 investigation is deriving from the annual reports of 2015 and 2016 of Free Press Unlimited, which suggests that this new investigation is linked to the old case of 2015 about the receipt of foreign funding from that NGO to conduct training workshops for citizen journalists.

These charges are related to legitimate activities that are protected under the right to association. Under international human rights law, the right to freedom of association includes NGOs' capacity to engage in fundraising activities and to seek, receive and utilise resources from national, foreign and international sources. Restrictions on foreign funding that impede the ability of associations to pursue their statutory activities constitute an undue interference with Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a party.¹

In October 2019, Amnesty International revealed how Maati Monjib and Abdessadak El Bouchattaoui, a human rights lawyer, had been subjected to unlawful digital surveillance since at least 2017 through the use of the "Pegasus" spyware produced by the Israeli company [NSO Group](#).

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 2 March 2021

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Maati Monjib (He/ His)

¹ Human Rights Committee and Viktor Korneenko et al v. Belarus, (1274/2004) UN Doc CCPR/C/88/D/1274/2004, 2006, para 7.2; Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, 2013, UN Doc. /AHRC/23/39, para. 16