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JOINT STATEMENT

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Morocco: Intimidation and harassment campaign against human rights defender Maati Monjib must end

The undersigned civil society organizations call on the Moroccan authorities to immediately end their intimidation and harassment campaign against academic and human rights defender Maati Monjib and drop all baseless charges leveled against him.

In October 2015, Monjib, along with six of his colleagues, received their first summons related to unsubstantiated charges of “endangering state security” after they received funding from a Dutch non-governmental organization to develop training for citizen journalists. The trial has been postponed 20 times since then, most recently at the beginning of October. At the same time, several newspapers and online media termed “slander media” in Morocco by a collective of 110 Moroccan journalists have regularly smeared Monjib and accused him of, among other things, money laundering, embezzlement, and being a traitor to the state.

On October 7 of this year, the authorities separated Monjib’s case from that of the other six defendants and brought forward new charges of embezzlement and money laundering against him, where he could face up to five years in prison. Since then, the Moroccan security services have summoned Monjib and four of his sisters numerous times for hours-long interrogations, as well as maintained heightened surveillance outside all of their respective homes. The smear campaign has also increased after Monjib exercised his right to freedom of expression by providing comments critical of the Directorate of Territorial Surveillance, Morocco’s main intelligence agency, to RFI Radio.

During the last five years, the Moroccan government has regularly targeted Monjib because of his human rights work. In 2015, he was placed on a travel ban—that was only lifted after Monjib went on a hunger strike for 24 days—and prohibited from teaching at University Mohammed V. Meanwhile, in October 2019, Amnesty International [documented](#) that Monjib’s phone had been targeted since at least October 2017 using spyware created by the Israel-based technology firm NSO Group (the same controversial software used to target associates of [Jamal Khashoggi](#) and [Omar Radi](#)). Concerningly—and likely as a result of the harassment campaign—Monjib has been the victim of several verbal assaults by unidentified individuals while he merely walks the streets of Rabat.

Moroccan authorities have long focused their attention on Monjib due to his academic work and activism, which has often been critical of the Moroccan government's corruption and human rights abuses. He is a founding member of the Moroccan Association for Investigative Journalism and the president of the nongovernmental organization Freedom Now that defends freedom of expression and journalism in Morocco. He has long been a strong advocate for press freedom, regularly organizing capacity-building workshops for independent journalists, including to teach them how to use StoryMaker, an open source app to help journalists produce professional multimedia reporting with a mobile phone. Monjib also drew the ire of the authorities for his participation in the February 20th movement that called for democratic reforms in 2011.

The ongoing harassment of Monjib is yet another example of the deterioration of the human rights situation in Morocco. Just in the past year, the Moroccan authorities have harassed and/or arrested independent journalists Omar Radi, Hajar Raissouni, Imad Stitou, and Soulaymane Raissouni, as well as [musical artists and social media influencers](#), simply for peacefully [criticizing](#) the king or other authorities. Unsurprisingly, the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) and [Reporters without Borders](#) have documented the kingdom's concerning degradation in press freedom. Monjib's case has also been featured in PEN America's [2019 Freedom to Write Index](#) and [Writers at Risk Database](#), which catalogue the global persecution of public intellectuals and writers including the increased pressure seen in Morocco.

The undersigned organizations call on the international community, including the U.S. Department of State, members of the U.S. Congress, members of the European Parliament and the European External Action Service to:

- call on Moroccan authorities to drop any spurious charges against Maati Monjib, and immediately end the unlawful surveillance, intimidation, and harassment against him and his family; and
- strongly denounce the use of NSO spyware to target journalists, bloggers, artists, and civil society activists in Morocco.

Sincerely,

Amnesty International
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
CIVICUS
Committee to Protect Journalists
Human Rights Watch
MENA Rights Group
PEN America
Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED)
The Freedom Initiative
FIDH, within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

OMCT (World Organisation Against Torture), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
Reporters Without Borders