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## **Morocco: Court acquits rights activists; action to guarantee right of assembly urged**

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch welcomed the acquittal on 21 November of 36 human rights activists by a Rabat appeal court.

In a joint report issued today on the case, *Morocco / Western Sahara: Freedom of assembly on trial*, the two groups urged rapid progress in ensuring the right of Moroccans to demonstrate peacefully.

The 36 defendants had been convicted on 16 May by a lower court of organizing an "unauthorized" demonstration and sentenced to three months in prison and a fine.

Today's acquittal comes nearly a year after the defendants were arrested as they attempted to hold a peaceful sit-in in Rabat to demand an end to impunity for perpetrators of human rights abuses. Police assaulted the participants even before the sit-in began, clubbing and punching them before making the arrests.

"Despite the progress on human rights in Morocco, the violent arrests of the demonstrators and their initial conviction show that the right to assemble in Morocco is far from guaranteed," Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said.

The rally of 9 December 2000 was organized by the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (*Association marocaine des droits humains*, AMDH), to demand an end to the impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations, especially the "disappearances," torture and arbitrary imprisonment that were commonplace in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sent observers to the trial of the 36 human rights activists who were arrested that night and charged. After spending one night in jail, they have been provisionally at liberty pending the final verdict.

**Read the report:** *Morocco / Western Sahara: Freedom of assembly on trial*

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