

18 January 2008

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Fear of unfair imprisonment/ Prisoners of conscience**MOROCCO/
conscience]
WESTERN SAHARA****Mohamed Bougrine (m), aged 72, prisoner of****Abdelkbir Rabaoui (m)]****Abass Abbassi (m)]****Mohamed Fadel (m)]****Abdelaziz Timor (m)]****All members of the
Brahim Ahansal (m)]****Moroccan****Association for Human Rights****Smaïn Amrar (m)]****Abderrahmane Aaji (m)]****(Association Marocaine des
Droits Humains,****AMDH)****Mohamed Yousfi (m)]****Nabil Cherqui (m)]**

On 30 January, the Moroccan Court of Cassation is due to hand down its judgement on the case of the 10 men named above, who are all members of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (*Association Marocaine des Droits Humains*, AMDH). They were convicted in August 2007 of “undermining the monarchy” by a court of appeal. Should the Court of Cassation confirm the conviction, prisoner of conscience Mohamed Bougrine, in jail since his arrest on 5 June 2007, risks serving a three-year prison sentence simply for having expressed his views peacefully. The nine other men, who remain at liberty pending the final judgement, would also face imprisonment. Amnesty International would consider them to be prisoners of conscience, held solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression and assembly.

The 10 were arrested on 5 and 6 June 2007, after participating in a peaceful sit-in in the city of Beni Mellal, held in solidarity with seven other members of the AMDH arrested after demonstrations on 1 May 2007. During the sit-in, participants chanted slogans critical of the monarchy, such as “no more taboos, more freedom”. The monarchy remains a taboo subject in Morocco. In recent years, several people, including journalists and political activists, have been prosecuted and in some cases sentenced to prison terms, after peacefully expressing critical views on the monarchy.

On 26 June, a court sentenced Mohamed Bougrine to one year imprisonment on charges of “undermining the monarchy”. Three others were sentenced to two-month suspended prison terms, and the remaining six men were acquitted. However, following an appeal by the prosecution, Mohamed Bougrine’s sentence was increased to three years’ imprisonment, and the nine others were given a one-year prison sentence.

Mohamed Bougrine has already spent long periods of time in detention in relation to his political activism. He has complained of respiratory problems exacerbated by poor prison conditions. Although his family visits him once a week, he is not permitted visits from friends and colleagues from the AMDH.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Seven other members of the AMDH were earlier arrested and convicted of “undermining the monarchy” after participating in peaceful demonstrations on 1 May 2007, marking International Workers’ Day. Thami Khyati, Youssef Reggab, Oussama Ben Messaoud, Ahmed Al Kaateb and Rabii Raïssouni, who were arrested in the city of Ksar el Kebir, were sentenced to three years’ imprisonment and heavy fines. On 24 July, a court of appeal confirmed the convictions and increased their prison sentences from three to four years.

Two other AMDH members, Mehdi Berbouchi and Abderrahim Karrad, were arrested in the city of

Agadir and sentenced to two years' imprisonment and heavy fines, also for "undermining the monarchy". The judgement and sentences against the two were confirmed on appeal. Amnesty International adopted the seven men as prisoners of conscience.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Arabic, French or your own language:

- expressing concern that ten members of the AMDH are likely to face imprisonment solely for peacefully expressing their views, should the Moroccan Court of Cassation confirm an earlier conviction against the men for "undermining the monarchy";
- calling on the Moroccan authorities to quash all prison sentences and fines against the 17 AMDH members convicted of "undermining the monarchy", as they have been convicted solely for having exercised their fundamental rights to free expression and assembly;
- calling on the Moroccan authorities to immediately and unconditionally release the eight AMDH prisoners of conscience currently in jail;

APPEALS TO:

Mr Abdelwahed Radi
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
Place Mamounia
Rabat, Morocco

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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/ Your Excellency

Mr Taieb Fassi Fihri
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
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Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre/ Your Excellency

COPIES TO:

Mr Ahmed Herzenni
President
Human Rights Advisory Council (Conseil consultatif des droits de l'Homme)
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and to diplomatic representatives of Morocco accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 January 2008.