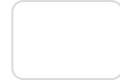


Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	376
Land:	Marokko-Vestsahara
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Morocco – Exonerate, Release Activist Sentenced for Blasphemy
Udgivet:	11. september 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	16. februar 2026



Document #2130114

HRW – Human Rights Watch
(Author)

Morocco: Exonerate, Release Activist Sentenced for Blasphemy

30 Months in Jail, Steep Fines for Wearing T-Shirt

(Beirut) – [Moroccan](#) authorities should urgently overturn the 30-month sentence of an activist convicted on blasphemy charges for wearing a t-shirt authorities deemed offensive, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities need to ensure that the right to free expression is respected.

The activist, Ibtissame Lachgar, was arrested on August 10, 2025, and charged by the Rabat First Instance Court with “causing harm to Islam” after posting a photo on social media of herself wearing a shirt with the words “Allah is lesbian.” The court found she had violated Morocco’s penal code and on September 3 [sentenced](#) her to 30 months in prison and a fine of 50,000 Moroccan dirhams (approximately US\$5,500). Her defense team has [said](#) they will appeal. Lachgar remains in detention.

“Sentencing an activist to more than two years in prison merely for posting a photo on social media is a huge blow to free speech in Morocco,” said [Hanan Salah](#), associate Middle East and North Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should abolish this draconian legislation instead of using it as a tool to violate free speech rights.”

Lachgar is a clinical psychologist and prominent activist who co-founded MALI, a movement for personal freedoms. Her lawyers [reportedly](#) had asked the authorities to release her from pretrial detention on medical grounds because she has a condition that requires ongoing treatment. Media reported that the Rabat tribunal had [denied](#) that application.

Prosecutors in Morocco have an arsenal of repressive legislation to punish critics for nonviolent speech, including harsh and overbroad laws on terrorism, cybercrime, apostasy, and criminal defamation that they use to jail human rights defenders, activists, and bloggers. In 2022, a Moroccan court sentenced a [blogger, Fatima Karim](#), to two years in prison on charges that she publicly insulted Islam through posts on her Facebook page.

Under article 267.5 of the country's penal code, a person convicted of ["causing harm" to Islam](#) faces six months to two years in prison and a fine of 20,000 to 200,000 dirhams (approximately \$2,200 to \$22,000). The punishment can be increased to two to five years and a fine of 50,000 to 500,000 dirhams (approximately \$5,500 to \$55,000) if the alleged offense is committed through print, audiovisual, or electronic media.

Morocco's press code also stipulates fines and a court-ordered suspension for publications and electronic media found responsible for ["causing harm" to Islam](#) (article 70).

The Moroccan authorities should decriminalize laws that are used to violate freedom of expression, including laws that criminalize ["insulting religion"](#) and blasphemy laws, Human Rights Watch said. Morocco's parliament should revise the penal and press codes by eliminating all nonviolent speech offenses that conflict with Morocco's obligations to respect freedom of expression.

The [International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights](#), ratified by Morocco in 1979, requires that ["Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference,"](#) and that ["everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression."](#) The United Nations Human Rights Committee, an expert body charged with interpreting the covenant and assessing government's compliance with it, has [determined](#) that, except in very limited circumstances, ["prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Covenant."](#)

["Decriminalizing peaceful speech, including laws on blasphemy and insult to religion, should be a top priority for Morocco's legislature,"](#) Salah said.

Associated documents

Document ID 2130114 Translation / language version

11 September 2025 | [HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Morocco

Activist Ibtissame Lachgar sentenced to 30 months in prison for wearing a T-shirt authorities deemed offensive

Maroc : Une activiste condamnée pour blasphème devrait être disculpée et libérée (Appeal or News Release, French)

fr

ID 2130116

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Activist Ibtissame Lachgar sentenced to 30 months in prison for wearing a T-shirt authorities deemed offensive

Country:

Morocco

Source:

[HRW – Human Rights Watch](#) (Author)

Published:

11 September 2025

Original link:

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/11/morocco-exonerate-release-activist-sentenced-for-blasphemy>

Document type:

Appeal or News Release

Language:

English

Available on ecoi.net since:

15 September 2025

Document ID:

2130114