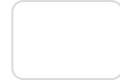


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## RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières (Author)

### Morocco: one year after royal pardon, press still under attack

Although a royal pardon granted in July 2024 led to the release of journalists Taoufik Bouachrine, Omar Radi, and Soulaymane Raissouni, the hopes it raised for further improvements in press freedom have been dashed. Since the pardon, judicial harassment and defamation campaigns against critical journalists have not only continued but also intensified. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls on Moroccan authorities to end the repression of media professionals and to enact genuine reforms in press freedom.

In Morocco, the justice system is being weaponised as a tool of intimidation to silence the media, as evidenced by the several cases of journalists and media workers facing jail time over various charges. For example, the director of the online media outlet *Badil.info*, [Hamid El Mahdaoui](#), a leading figure in the independent press known for his work on corruption and defending marginalised peoples, is currently facing five legal proceedings, all initiated by Justice Minister Abdellatif Ouahbi.

On 30 June 2025, the Court of Appeal upheld Hamid El Mahdaoui's sentence of 18 months in prison and a fine of 1.5 million dirhams (approximately \$130,000) for "dissemination of false allegations" and "defamation." Based on the Penal Code, this decision [circumvents the press law](#), which excludes prison sentences for this type of offence. In addition to this case, now before the Court of Cassation, there are two other ongoing prosecutions for "insults" and "dissemination of false allegations" in connection with journalists' comments on the minister's actions. Two other investigations have been opened in connection with Hamid El Mahdaoui's publications.

The director of the website *Achkayen*, **Hicham El Amrani**, is also on trial for “insults” and “publication in bad faith of allegations or inaccurate facts” following a complaint by the Minister of Justice over an article published in July 2024 on the so-called “Escobar of the Sahara” case that covered corruption and drug trafficking, and implicated influential figures. The journalist was finally acquitted in April 2025.

*“One year after the royal pardon, Moroccan journalists remain under constant threat of prosecution and smear campaigns. RSF calls on the authorities to implement structural reforms to guarantee press freedom and pave the way for a genuinely diverse independent media landscape.”*

Oussama Bouagila  
Advocacy Officer, RSF North Africa

Other journalists have been prosecuted on similar charges over the past year:

- Freelance journalist **Hanane Bakour** was given a one-month suspended prison sentence after an appeal in December 2024, following a complaint by the National Rally of Independents party, led by the prime minister, over a Facebook post about regional elections.
- Freelance journalist **Mouhamed Youssfi** appealed after being sentenced in June 2025 to two months in prison and a fine of 5,000 dirhams (about US\$570) for “defamation,” “spreading false allegations,” “contempt of a public body” and “publishing images of people without their consent” following complaints filed by local elected officials in Laâyoune, the largest city in the Occupied Western Sahara, where he had been prevented from covering an official event.
- The editor-in-chief of the news website *Alyaoum24*, **Abdelhaq Belachkar**, was prosecuted by the Minister of Justice for “insults” and “defamation” after investigating a controversial statement by the minister concerning a judicial expert opinion in a real estate dispute. The case is still pending.

### **Organised defamation campaigns to discredit journalists**

The day after [the royal pardon](#) of 2024, a widespread defamation campaign was launched against the journalists who had been released. These attacks, which also affected their relatives, included serious accusations such as collusion with foreign powers, corruption, and invasion of privacy. The media professionals most targeted included: the founder of the former daily newspaper *Akhbar Al-Yaoum*, **Taoufik Bouachrine**, who was imprisoned for six years on charges of “human trafficking,” “abuse of power for sexual purposes,” “rape, and attempted rape”; his colleague **Soulaimane Raissouni**, who [served a](#) four-year prison sentence for “sexual assault,” and forced to leave the country due to the repressive campaign; investigative journalist **Omar Radi**, also [imprisoned](#)

for four years on charges related to “rape”; and Hamid El Mahdaoui. Journalist **Khalid Fatihi** from the news website *Al 3omk* was publicly defamed by a former prime minister during a party meeting.

Most of these attacks are orchestrated via websites specialising in defamation and disinformation, as part of a deliberate strategy of terror aimed at intimidating journalists. Journalists are thus increasingly being victimised by the weaponisation of common law with the aim of discrediting and ultimately silencing them. While journalists are certainly subject to the law like everyone else, it is impossible to ignore the systemic and blatantly unfounded nature of the accusations levied against them. For this reason, RSF calls on the National Press Council to examine the aforementioned cases against journalists, in order to determine whether the media outlets involved should be sanctioned for ethical violations. RSF also calls on the Moroccan authorities to:

- **Respect the press and publishing law by ceasing** to use the criminal code to silence journalists and give priority to the press law, which provides a more appropriate framework for respecting the rights and freedoms at stake in cases against journalists;
  - **Repeal the “red lines” imposed on the media in Article 71 of the Press Code** and realign the law with Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ratified by Morocco;
  - **Establish a transparent and non-discriminatory framework for public aid to the press** in order to strengthen pluralism and guarantee access to independent and reliable information.
  - **Resume constructive dialogue and restore trust** between the government, media organisations, and press freedom organisations, including RSF.
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