

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	86
Land:	Marokko
Kilde:	Freedom House.
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2009 – Morocco.
Udgivet:	16. juli 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. oktober 2009

Title	Freedom in the World 2009 - Morocco
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Morocco
Publication Date	16 July 2009
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2009 - Morocco</i> , 16 July 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a64529ac.html [accessed 5 October 2009]

Freedom in the World 2009 - Morocco

Capital: Rabat

Population: 31,200,000

Political Rights Score: 5

Civil Liberties Score: 4

Status: Partly Free

Explanatory Note

The numerical ratings and status listed above do not reflect conditions in Western Sahara, which is examined in a separate report.

Overview

During 2008, Morocco continued to struggle to institutionalize reforms to advance democracy and human rights. Despite the government's establishment of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission in 2004 to address past government abuses, authorities have since proven intolerant of public discussion of current abuses. Demonstrations in late May and early June against unemployment in the southern port city of Sidi Ifni were forcibly disbursed, and local human rights groups alleged that security forces committed abuses. The government continued to crack down on the press during the year, with critical journalists subject to harassment, fines, and even imprisonment.

Morocco gained independence in 1956 after more than four decades of French rule. The first ruler after independence, King Mohamed V, reigned until his death in 1961. His son, the autocratic Hassan II, then ruled the country until 1999. Thousands of his political opponents were killed, tortured, arrested, or disappeared. This repression was particularly acute in the years following two failed coup attempts in 1971 and 1972. In 1975, Morocco and Mauritania occupied Western Sahara; after three years of guerrilla warfare against the Algerian backed Polisario Front, Mauritania pulled out of the territory, which was then annexed by Morocco. A planned referendum on Western Sahara's future – attached to a UN-monitored ceasefire agreement in 1991 – never took place. In the last few years of his life, Hassan made moves aimed at opening up Morocco politically. Several political prisoners were released, independent newspapers began publishing, and a new bicameral parliament was established in 1997.

King Mohamed VI inherited the throne at age 35. Although human rights and civil society activists, as well opposition leaders, had high hopes that the young king would expand

the small measure of political freedom that his father had offered, little significant change transpired for the first few years of his reign. Morocco was struggling economically, and the king feared the increased influence of Islamist-oriented political parties.

Mohamed did impress some critics by removing Interior Minister Driss Basri from his position, which he had held for two decades. Basri, a close confidante of King Hassan, had been identified as one of the leaders in repressing the king's opponents. He left Morocco after his dismissal, while exiled dissidents were permitted to return.

Parliamentary elections held in 2002 were recognized as generally open. Over a dozen political parties participated, though independent journalists and other critics of the king were harassed and detained.

In May 2003, local Islamist militants with links to al-Qaeda rocked Casablanca with a series of suicide bombings that targeted symbols of Morocco's Jewish community. The victims were mostly civilians, and the government's response was immediate and harsh. An antiterrorism law was passed, but it has since been used to prosecute nonviolent opponents of the king. Local and international human rights groups charged that the authorities were using the opportunity of the attacks to pursue vocal government critics.

In January 2004, King Mohamed took a dramatic, unprecedented step when he inaugurated the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER). As the first equity commission in the Arab world, it was tasked with addressing the human rights abuses perpetrated against Moroccan citizens by the authorities from 1956 to 1999 and providing the victims with reparations. The commission held public hearings in which victims were given an opportunity to speak about the abuse they suffered. The IER was headed by Driss Benzekri, who had spent 17 years as a political prisoner. In January 2006, the commission submitted its final report to the king, which included a series of recommendations for legal and institutional reforms designed to prevent a repetition of past abuses. Some critics of the IER have complained that even though victims have been given a chance to publicize their suffering and receive compensation, the perpetrators are not being held to account for their actions. Critics also claim that in the two years since the IER's final report was published, few structural changes have been made, and human rights abuses still occur on a regular basis, albeit on a lower scale. The government has furthermore been intolerant of discussion of these past abuses; in June 2008, a court in Rabat ordered the private daily *Al-Jarida al-Oula* to stop publishing testimony given at the IER.

In September 2007, Moroccans went to the polls to elect the Chamber of Representatives, the lower house of Parliament. The voting drew the lowest turnout in Moroccan history, at 37 percent. The Socialist Union of People's Forces (USFP), previously the lead party in the ruling coalition, lost nearly a quarter of its seats, leaving it with 38. Its chief ally, the conservative Independence Party (Istiqlal), won a plurality of 52 seats. Opposition parties, which had criticized the elections' fairness, gained fewer seats than expected; the largest, the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD), placed second with 46 seats. Istiqlal leader Abbas El-Fassi was appointed prime minister.

From all indications, it seems doubtful that authorities plan to make significant institutional reform. In 2008, the government continued to harass critics, including journalists and activists.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Morocco is not an electoral democracy. Most power is still held by the king and his close advisers. The monarch can dissolve Parliament, rule by decree, and dismiss or appoint cabinet members. He sets national and foreign policy, commands the armed forces, and presides over the judicial system. One of the king's constitutional titles is "commander of the faithful," giving his authority a religious dimension.

The 1996 constitution reintroduced a bicameral legislature, which had existed briefly

after independence but was replaced by a single chamber for the next four decades. The lower house, the Chamber of Representatives, has 325 directly elected members who serve for five-year terms. Members of the 270-seat upper house, the Chamber of Counselors, are chosen by an electoral college to serve nine-year terms.

Given the concentration of power in the monarchy, opposition parties and even the cabinet are generally unable to assert themselves. The most vocal opposition party that remains respectful of the monarchy is the Justice and Development Party (PJD.) The most popular non-legal opposition movement is the Justice and Charity Movement headed by Nadia Yassine, the daughter of the founder of the movement, Abdesslam Yassine. Other, more overtly nonviolent Islamist groups that criticize the monarchical system are harassed by authorities and not permitted to participate in the political process.

Despite the government's promises to address corruption, it remains a serious problem. People with close ties to the monarchy receive preferential treatment in business and other matters. Morocco was ranked 80 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Morocco's journalists have boldly reported on taboo subjects over the years, but the state has responded harshly to journalists who are too critical of the king, his family, or Islam, leading to self-censorship. In addition to a restrictive press law, the government employs an array of economic and other, more subtle mechanisms to punish independent and opposition journalists. After years of promises about a new, liberal press law, the king proposed a draft in 2007 that contained many of the punitive provisions of the old press code; it still had not been adopted by the end of 2008.

The government continued to harass critical journalists throughout 2008, continuing the trend set in 2007. In February 2008, the Supreme Court upheld an August 2007 eight-month prison sentence against journalist Mustafa Hormatallah of the independent weekly *Al-Watan Al An*. Hormatallah and his editor had been found guilty in 2007 of possessing classified documents following the paper's publication of government documents concerning terrorist threats against the state; Hormatallah was finally released in late July 2008 after serving his sentence. A court in July also found Al-Jazeera bureau chief Hassan Rachidi guilty of publishing false news, following the station's reporting of social unrest in the southern coastal city of Sidi Ifni; Rachidi had his press credentials withdrawn and was fined nearly \$6,000. Separately, an appeals court in October upheld a lower court's decision against Rachid Niny, the managing editor of the daily *Al-Massae*; the lower court had ordered him to pay approximately \$700,000 in damages and fines for allegedly defaming four deputy prosecutors.

Nearly all Moroccans are Muslims, but the small Jewish community is permitted to practice its faith without government interference. Some Moroccan Jews have achieved prominent positions in society. While university campuses generally provide a space for open discussion, professors practice self-censorship when dealing with sensitive topics like Western Sahara, the monarchy, and Islam.

Civil society and independent nongovernmental organizations are quite active in Morocco, and the government rarely interferes in their day-to-day work. The authorities do monitor Islamist groups and arrest suspected extremists. Freedom of assembly is not well respected, and protests in Western Sahara especially have been controlled through violence and threats. In late May and early June 2008, demonstrations against the high level of unemployment in the southern port city of Sidi Ifni were forcibly disbursed; local human rights groups reported that security forces arrested over one hundred protestors and were responsible for abuses and sexual violence. Following the protests, authorities detained and tried Brahim Sab'alil of the Moroccan Center for Human Rights after he presented documentation allegedly proving that security forces had committed abuses against the demonstrators. Sab'alil was found guilty of insulting public authorities and publishing false information and was released from prison in late December 2008 after serving a six-month jail term.

Moroccan workers are permitted to form and join independent trade unions, but as the Sidi Ifni protests illustrate, authorities are wary of impromptu labor activity that is also harshly critical of the government. According to the 2004 labor law, the government has only a limited ability to intervene in strikes. The law also prevents business owners from punishing workers who join and establish unions. However, child laborers, especially girls working as domestic helpers, are denied basic rights.

The judiciary is not independent. Courts rarely make decisions that violate official policy. The courts are also subject to government pressure and have been used as a weapon to punish government critics. Under the recommendations that accompanied the Equity and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2006, the authorities were supposed to institute a series of legal and institutional reforms to prevent repetition of past human rights abuses. While the report and the overall work of the commission were bold, substantive changes have been slow in implementation, and some critics allege that the situation is unlikely to improve. Arbitrary arrest and torture still occur, but they are less common than under the previous king. The security forces are given greater leeway for abuse with detainees from Western Sahara.

The small Jewish community is well integrated into Moroccan society. Many Moroccans have a mixed Arab-Berber ancestry, and the government has officially recognized the language and culture of the Berbers.

Moroccan authorities have a more progressive view on the issue of gender equality than leaders in many Arab countries. Numerous laws assert women's rights. The 2004 family code has been lauded for granting women increased rights in the areas of marriage and child custody. However, women still face a great deal of discrimination at the societal level.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved
