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Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission

Eamon Gilmore, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

Paris, 19 March 2021

Re: The case of Franco-Moroccan journalist Maâti Monjib

Dear High Representative Borrell,
Dear EU Special Representative Gilmore,

We, the undersigned organisations, are writing to draw your attention to the case of journalist Maâti Monjib and call for your urgent intervention.

The Moroccan and French journalist Maâti Monjib began a hunger strike on 4 March. Mr Monjib has lost more than 8 kilos and as he is diabetic with heart problems, his health and life are now in danger. He is visited twice a day by a doctor because of his fragile health.

Also known as a human rights defender, Mr. Monjib has been held in solitary confinement since 29 December 2020 and he was subsequently convicted in absentia on 27 January 2021 to one-year imprisonment on grounds of 'undermining state security' and 'fraud'. No substantive handling of the lawsuit preceded this ruling, which had been postponed over 20 times since 2015. Moreover, neither the

lawyers nor the convicts could attend the hearing, while it was the Moroccan state's responsibility to allow Mr Monjib to attend his court case as he was in their custody at the time. They failed to do so — in clear violation of his right to a fair trial. Mr Monjib still faces charges of money laundering, which was the reason for his arrest on the 29th of December 2020. There has been no progress on this case since then.

The case of Maâti Monjib is illustrative of the increasing repression of independent and critical voices over the last decade in Morocco.

Eleven years after the Arab Spring, the situation for press freedom and freedom of expression in Morocco is dire. Since the end of 2013, journalists, activists and dissidents continue to face ongoing systematic targeting, harassment and detention. Repression has increasingly been used as the answer to the growing social resistance against corruption and social inequality in Morocco.

A pattern can be seen in recent years with the Moroccan authorities filing trumped up criminal charges accusing journalists of rape or fraud in retaliation for their critical work. We are also seeing an increase in prosecutions based on offending public officials or insulting the monarchy.

Other prominent prisoners include:

- Moroccan journalist Omar Radi, who is currently in pre-trial detention on charges of rape and espionage,
- Moroccan journalist and founder of the daily paper 'Akhbar Al-Youm' Taoufik Bouachrine, who is currently completing his 15 year prison sentence on charges of "trafficking in human beings, violent and indecent assault, rape, attempted rape and sexual harassment".
- Moroccan editor in chief of the independent newspaper 'Akhbar Al-Youm' Soulaimane Raissouni, who is currently imprisoned awaiting for his trial on charges of "violent and indecent assault and forced detention" to be continued.

At least five journalists are currently imprisoned for their work in Morocco, while the country ranks 133 out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders 2020 World Press Freedom Index.

We urge you:

- to strongly condemn the sentencing and imprisonment of Maâti Monjib and to press the Moroccan authorities for his immediate release, in light of his rapidly deteriorating health situation;

- to urge the Moroccan authorities, and in particular His Majesty King Mohammed VI, for the unconditional and immediate release of all those imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, including Maâti Monjib, Omar Radi, Slimane Raissouni, Taoufik Bouachrine and Abdelkabir al Horr ;
- to call on the Moroccan Government to stop the harassment of human rights defenders and journalists, and to ensure the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press;
- to urge Morocco's government to take concrete and measurable steps towards justice reform and respect for human rights as a key element for enhanced EU-Morocco cooperation;
- to call on the EU Delegation in Rabat to fully implement the EU Guidelines on Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Defenders, to provide all appropriate support to human rights defenders and journalists detained, including through arranging prison visits, trial monitoring and public statements, and to offer support to civil society and access to protection for people at risk of persecution.

We hope you will take our concerns into consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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Article 19
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IFEX
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