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### **Morocco: Rida Benotmane's lawyer calls for review of procedural errors on his 3-year sentence**

On 13 February 2023, journalist and human rights defender **Rida Benotmane** appeared before the Rabat Court of Appeal, represented by his lawyers. The counsel for the human rights defender presented the procedural appeals, pleading to the court to nullify the conviction decision of the First Instance Court based on multiple procedural errors. On 7 November 2022, the Court of First Instance in Rabat sentenced Rida Benotmane to three years in prison and a fine for expressing his opinion on social media.

[Rida Benotmane](#) is a Moroccan human rights defender, journalist and author. He is a member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights ([AMDH](#)) and the Freedom Now association. Between 2007 and 2011, Rida Benotmane was imprisoned for four years for online commentaries he made that denounced torture in secret detention centres in Morocco. He was convicted on appeal of “apology for terrorism”, an offence which involves reacting positively to an act of terrorism, as well as “offence to the person of the king”.

On 13 February 2022, the Rabat Court of Appeal heard the procedural appeals submitted by the defence counsel in the case of human rights defender Rida Benotmane. Among their demands, the human rights defender's lawyers pleaded to the Court to nullify the conviction, which had been issued by the Court of First Instance, on the grounds that this sentence was incompatible with Articles 751 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The next hearing session is set to be on 20 February 2023, at which point the court will further deliberate on the procedural appeals before it decides whether it will proceed to discuss the substantive appeals, as required by law.

According to the human rights defender's lawyers, procedural errors were present in all stages of the human rights defender's case, including his arrest, his investigation, his interrogation and the legal characterization of the acts attributed to him. As part of the procedural appeals, the defence counsel also raised the issue, that the judge of First Instance neglected to address all the procedural appeals raised by the counsel up until that point.

The first appeal session was set to be held on 16 January 2023, but it was delayed on this date and again on 30 January 2023.

On 7 November 2022, the Court of First Instance in Rabat sentenced Rida Benotmane to three years imprisonment and a fine of MAD 5,000 (approximately EUR 450) for expressing his opinion on social media. The human rights defender was convicted of "contempt of constitutional institutions," although it was reported that the proceedings focused exclusively on the human rights defender's online statements.

On 9 September 2022, after being summoned by the National Brigade of the Judicial Police (BNPJ) in Casablanca, Rida Benotmane was arrested over online commentaries on social media outlets that he had released in 2021. The human rights defender was questioned while his lawyer was not present. The questions focused on a Facebook post that called for a public march to denounce human rights abuses by the security forces, as well as two YouTube videos in which he expressed legitimate grievances against the authorities.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned about the continued harassment of Rida Benotmane as it believes that he is facing reprisal for his peaceful and legitimate work denouncing human rights violations, particularly his work as a journalist.

**Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:**

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Rida Benotmane and quash his conviction as it is believed that this has been solely motivated by his legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights;
2. Cease any further harassment against the human rights defender Rida Benotmane and his family;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Morocco are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisal and free from all restrictions, including judicial harassment.