

Advocacy dossier

Ibtissame (Betty) Lachgar

ابتسام لشكر

Imprisoned (serving sentence) **Morocco**

Ibtissame Lachgar is a clinical psychologist, feminist and co-founder of MALI, a movement defending individual freedoms. Arrested in August 2025 over a social media post criticising religious patriarchy, she is serving a 30-month sentence for "causing harm to Islam" in El Arjat prison, where her health has seriously deteriorated.

01

The case at a glance

Ibtissame Lachgar is a clinical psychologist, feminist and co-founder of MALI, a movement defending individual freedoms. Arrested in August 2025 over a social media post criticising religious patriarchy, she is serving a 30-month sentence for "causing harm to Islam" in El Arjat prison, where her health has seriously deteriorated.

Status **Imprisoned (serving sentence)**	Arrested **10 Aug 2025**	Country **Morocco**
Sentence Thirty months in prison and a fine of 50,000 Moroccan dirhams (approximately 4,750 euros).		
Charges Causing harm to Islam (Article 267-5 of the Moroccan Penal Code)		

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Release Ibtissame (Betty) Lachgar immediately and unconditionally.

02 Drop all charges related to the peaceful exercise of fundamental rights.

03 Ensure unrestricted access to legal counsel, family, and adequate medical care while in detention.

04 Provide Ibtissame (Betty) Lachgar with immediate, independent medical evaluation and the full treatment that condition requires, including transfer to an independent civilian hospital if necessary.

02

Documented violations

Each violation and the international standard it breaks.

Arbitrary detention International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

Criminalisation of solidarity International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Articles 21, 22
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 5

Defamation and smear campaign International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 17
UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Denial of medical care UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rules 24 to 27

Inhumane detention conditions International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 10
UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules)

Judicial harassment UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Articles 9, 12

Threats and intimidation UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, Article 12

Unfair trial International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14

03

How the case unfolded

13 September 2009

Context

Questioned over a public Ramadan picnic protest

She co-organised a public picnic by MALI during Ramadan in protest at Article 222 of the Penal Code. Police stopped participants at Mohammedia station; on 17 September she was questioned and released with a warning.

8 September 2016

Arrest

Arrested in Rabat for disturbing public order

She was arrested in Rabat with a companion and accused of public drunkenness and disturbing public order.

10 September 2016

Release

Released when the prosecutor dropped the case

She was released after about two days in custody when the prosecutor dismissed the case.

August 2018

Arrest

Held for 24 hours in Rabat

She was held in Rabat for about 24 hours, accused of drunkenness and causing a disturbance. Reports differ on the circumstances: one says she had gone to the police to report an attack, another links the arrest to a campaign for abortion rights.

August 2018

Release

Released without prosecution

She was released after about 24 hours without prosecution.

10 August 2025

Arrest

Arrest following social media post

Ibtissame Lachgar was arrested by Moroccan authorities after posting a photograph of herself wearing a T-shirt with the slogan "Allah is lesbian," accompanied by a critique of religious patriarchy. She was charged with causing harm to Islam under Article 267-5 of the Penal Code.

10 August 2025

Charge filed

Prosecuted under Article 267-5 of the Penal Code

Lachgar was prosecuted under Article 267-5 of the Penal Code, on an allegation of insulting Islam.

13 August 2025

Hearing

Trial begins

Lachgar's trial opened at the Rabat First Instance Court, three days after her arrest. The hearing was postponed to allow further proceedings.

27 August 2025

Hearing

Hearing postponed

A scheduled hearing was postponed to 3 September 2025. Lachgar's lawyers requested provisional release on medical grounds; the court denied the request.

3 September 2025

Conviction

Conviction and sentence

The Rabat First Instance Court convicted Lachgar of causing harm to Islam and sentenced her to 30 months in prison and a fine of 50,000 dirhams. The verdict was based on Article 267-5 of the Moroccan Penal Code.

6 October 2025

Appeal: judgment upheld

Rabat Court of Appeal upholds the 30-month sentence

The Rabat Court of Appeal upheld the 30-month prison sentence and the fine. Her defence announced an appeal to the Court of Cassation.

June 2026

Context

Cassation appeal still pending

Her lawyer said the appeal to the Court of Cassation was still pending and that a royal pardon had been requested on humanitarian grounds. The prison administration denied claims of mistreatment.

10 June 2026

Detention conditions and health

Independent medical assessment warns about her condition in prison

Conclusions of a medical assessment by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) raised concern about the seriousness of her medical condition and her conditions of detention. The prosthesis in her left arm has loosened at the shoulder and elbow, and without appropriate care she risks irreversible harm, including amputation.

28 August 2026

Context

Held in solitary confinement; medical release refused

Amnesty International reported that she was held in solitary confinement, needed urgent surgery, and that several requests for provisional release on medical grounds had been rejected.

3 September 2026

Call by others

FIDH and OMCT call for her release one year after her conviction

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a partnership of FIDH and OMCT, said she remained detained in El Arjat prison with her health seriously deteriorated and without care matching her needs. It called for her immediate release and urged the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) to visit the prison and examine her situation.

04

The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: Ibtissame Lachgar remains in El Arjat prison near Rabat, serving the 30-month sentence upheld on appeal in October 2025. In September 2026 FIDH and OMCT reported that her health had seriously deteriorated and called for her release; no release or pardon has been reported.

Background and Work

Ibtissame Lachgar is a clinical psychologist and feminist defender based in Morocco. She co-founded the Mouvement alternatif pour les libertés individuelles (MALI), an organization advocating for the decriminalization of abortion, gender equality, and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people. MALI has operated in an increasingly restrictive environment, challenging legal frameworks and social norms that limit individual freedoms, particularly those of women and sexual minorities.

Lachgar's work centers on confronting patriarchal structures in both secular and religious contexts. She has used social media as a platform to critique what she describes as the misogynistic and authoritarian elements embedded in religious ideologies. Her public statements have drawn both support from human rights communities and hostility from conservative sectors of Moroccan society.

The Arrest

On 10 August 2025, Moroccan authorities arrested Lachgar following her publication of a photograph on social media. In the image, she wore a T-shirt bearing the slogan "Allah is lesbian." The post included a written critique of religious patriarchy. The photograph provoked immediate backlash. Thousands of social media users targeted her with harassment, including explicit threats of sexual violence, lynching, and execution.

Authorities charged her with "causing harm to Islam" under Article 267-5 of the Moroccan Penal Code. This provision criminalizes public offenses against Islam and allows for imprisonment of up to five years. Her arrest exemplifies the use of religious offense laws to prosecute individuals who challenge dominant narratives around religion, gender, and sexuality.

Detention Conditions and Health

Lachgar is detained in El Arjat Prison near Rabat. She is held in total isolation, without contact with other inmates, including during outdoor time. Her lawyers have repeatedly raised concerns about her medical condition. She is a bone cancer survivor and requires urgent surgery on her left arm. Medical experts have warned that if the procedure is delayed, she may face amputation.

Her legal team requested provisional release to allow her to access necessary medical care. The court denied the request. The denial places her health at acute risk and raises concerns about the state's obligations to provide adequate medical care to detainees.

Legal Proceedings

Lachgar's trial began on 13 August 2025, three days after her arrest. Hearings were subsequently postponed to 27 August and then to 3 September.

On 3 September 2025, the Rabat First Instance Court convicted her and sentenced her to 30 months in prison and a fine of 50,000 Moroccan dirhams (approximately 4,750 euros). In October 2025 the Rabat Court of Appeal upheld the conviction and sentence.

The conviction rests on Article 267-5 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes acts deemed offensive to Islam when committed publicly, including online. The law provides no clear definition of what constitutes an offense, leaving its application open to broad and inconsistent interpretation. The sentence reflects the Moroccan judiciary's continued reliance on religious offense provisions to penalize dissent and restrict freedom of expression.

International Response

Lachgar's case has drawn attention from human rights organizations and feminist networks internationally. Her prosecution is seen as emblematic of the heightened risks faced by feminist and LGBTQ rights defenders in North Africa, particularly those who publicly challenge religious authority or advocate for sexual and reproductive rights.

The case raises fundamental concerns about freedom of expression under international human rights law, specifically Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a state party. Her conviction for non-violent expression contravenes these obligations. The combination of imprisonment, financial penalty, and denial of medical care constitutes a punitive response to peaceful advocacy and illustrates the chilling effect such prosecutions have on civic space.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/ibtissame-betty-lachgar/

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