

Advocacy dossier

Rida Benotmane

رضا بن عثمان

At liberty **Morocco**

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The case at a glance

Rida Benotmane is a journalist, author, and member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights. He served eighteen months in Laarjat 1 prison for Facebook posts and YouTube videos criticising authorities, his second imprisonment for online commentary.

Status	Arrested	Country
At liberty	**9 Sep 2022**	**Morocco**

Sentence	Eighteen months in prison and a fine of 5,000 Moroccan dirhams (approximately €450), on appeal from an initial sentence of three years.
Charges	Contempt of constitutional institutions Defaming a legally regulated entity Disparaging public officials in the performance of their duties Spreading false accusations without authorisation

What we ask

We call on the authorities to:

01 Drop any charges that remain on record against Rida Benotmane in connection with peaceful human rights work.

02 Confirm publicly that Rida Benotmane faces no residual travel, financial, or professional restriction arising from this case.

03 Guarantee that Rida Benotmane can resume that work without surveillance, summons, or further reprisal.

04 Provide effective remedy for the period of deprivation of liberty already served.

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

Denial of legal counsel International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 14(3)

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

Press freedom violation International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 19

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

03

How the case unfolded

2007

Appeal: judgment upheld

Convicted on appeal and sentenced to four years

An appeal court convicted Benotmane of 'apology for terrorism' and 'offence to the person of the king' over his online commentaries. He served four years in prison.

20 January 2007

Arrest

First arrest for online commentary

Benotmane was arrested for online commentaries denouncing torture in secret detention centres. He would serve four years.

2011

Release

Release after four-year sentence

Benotmane was released after serving a four-year sentence for 'apology for terrorism' and 'offence to the person of the king.'

2021

Defender activity

Posts calling for protest published

Benotmane posted Facebook commentary calling for a public march against security-force abuses and uploaded two YouTube videos criticising the authorities.

September 2022

Hunger strike begins

Hunger strike against his detention

Amnesty International reported that Benotmane was on hunger strike in protest at his detention.

9 September 2022

Arrest

Arrest after police summons

The National Brigade of the Judicial Police summoned Benotmane to Casablanca and arrested him. He was interrogated without his lawyer present.

10 September 2022

Charge filed

Charged and remanded in custody

The day after his arrest, Benotmane was charged with insulting a body regulated by law, insulting public officials in the performance of their duties, broadcasting false allegations and breaching the decree law on the state of health emergency, and was remanded to prison.

7 November 2022

Conviction

First-instance conviction

The Court of First Instance in Rabat sentenced Benotmane to three years in prison and a fine of 5,000 dirhams for 'contempt of constitutional institutions.' The verdict was pronounced in his absence.

16 January 2023

Hearing

First appeal hearing postponed

The scheduled appeal hearing was postponed. It was delayed again on 30 January 2023.

February 2023

Appeal: sentence reduced

Sentence reduced on appeal

The Rabat Court of Appeal reduced the sentence to eighteen months but upheld the conviction under multiple Penal Code articles.

February 2023

Solitary confinement imposed

Held in solitary confinement

After the appeal ruling, Amnesty International reported that Benotmane remained held in solitary confinement in Arjat 1 prison in Salé.

13 February 2023

Hearing

Appeal hearing convened

Benotmane appeared before the Rabat Court of Appeal. His lawyers argued procedural errors and sought nullification of the first-instance conviction.

9 March 2024

Release

Release after full sentence served

Benotmane was released from Laarjat 1 prison in Rabat after serving the full eighteen-month sentence.

13 January 2025

Context

Case submitted to the UN Human Rights Committee

MENA Rights Group asked the UN Human Rights Committee to examine the case of Rida Benotmane.

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The full story

Update, 12 November 2026: this record was checked against Amnesty International, MENA Rights Group and press coverage. Rida Benotmane has been at liberty since 9 March 2024, when he completed his eighteen-month sentence; the request MENA Rights Group sent to the UN Human Rights Committee in January 2025 has no published outcome. Amnesty International raised his case in September 2022 together with that of Saida El Alami.

Background and Work

Rida Benotmane is a journalist, author, and human rights monitor based in Morocco. He is a member of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) and the Freedom Now association. His work centres on documenting state abuses, advocating for detainees' rights, and amplifying dissent in a climate where criticism of the state carries severe penalties.

Between 2007 and 2011, Benotmane served four years in prison for online commentaries in which he denounced torture in secret detention centres. Authorities convicted him on appeal of "apology for terrorism", an offence defined as reacting positively to an act of terrorism, and "offence to the person of the king." The charges stemmed entirely from his online writing. After his release, he resumed his human rights work and continued to use social media to document violations and mobilise public action.

The Arrest

In 2021, Benotmane posted commentaries on Facebook and YouTube that criticised the security forces and called for public demonstrations against human rights abuses. One Facebook post explicitly called for a march to protest violations by the authorities. Two YouTube videos articulated grievances against the state, echoing themes he had long addressed in his journalism and advocacy.

On 9 September 2022, the National Brigade of the Judicial Police (BNPJ) in Casablanca summoned Benotmane for questioning. He was arrested the same day. Officers interrogated him in the absence of his lawyer. The questioning focused on the Facebook post calling for the march and the two YouTube videos. He was formally detained and transferred to Rabat to face prosecution.

Legal Proceedings

On 7 November 2022, the Court of First Instance in Rabat sentenced Benotmane to three years' imprisonment and a fine of 5,000 Moroccan dirhams (approximately €450). The court convicted him of "contempt of constitutional institutions." The verdict was pronounced in his absence. The proceedings centred exclusively on his online statements.

Benotmane's legal team challenged the conviction on multiple procedural grounds. They argued that errors had infected every stage of the case: the arrest itself, the conduct of the investigation, the interrogation in the absence of counsel, and the legal characterisation of the alleged offences. They further contended that the first-instance judge had failed to address the procedural objections raised by the defence. The appeal was scheduled for 16 January 2023 but was postponed twice before the court convened on 13 February 2023.

At the appeal hearing, defence counsel presented arguments to nullify the first-instance conviction on the basis of incompatibility with Article 751 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. They urged the court to set aside the sentence before proceeding to substantive review. In February 2023, the Rabat Court of Appeal reduced the sentence to eighteen months but upheld the conviction. The charges on appeal were listed as "defaming a legally regulated entity," "disparaging public officials in the performance of their duties," and "spreading false accusations without authorisation" under Articles 263, 265, 266, and 447(2) of the Moroccan Penal Code.

Detention and Release

Benotmane was held in Arjat 1 prison in Salé, near Rabat. He served the entirety of the reduced sentence without remission. On 9 March 2024, after eighteen months in detention, he was released. In January 2025 MENA Rights Group submitted his case to the UN Human Rights Committee.

Pattern of Repression

Benotmane's case reflects a sustained pattern of criminalising online expression in Morocco. His 2022 prosecution for Facebook posts and YouTube videos mirrors the charges that sent him to prison a decade earlier. The cycle of arrest, conviction on speech-related offences, and imprisonment underscores the persistence of judicial harassment against those who document state abuses or call for public accountability. His release in March 2024 closed one chapter of this pattern but did not resolve the broader repression that continues to shape the environment for journalists and human rights defenders in the country.

Latest updates on this case Scan the code or visit: https://humena.org/defenders/rida-benotmane/

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