Morocco End the crackdown on peaceful protests and uphold the right to demand social justice

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We, the undersigned human rights organizations, strongly condemn the escalating crackdown by Moroccan authorities on peaceful protests, including minors and human rights defenders, which has now extended into a third day. We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all those arrested for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly.

The protest campaign, which emerged from calls on digital platforms like Discord, began on September 27-28. Across major cities, including Rabat, Casablanca, Tangier, and Meknes, security forces employed excessive and disproportionate force to disperse peaceful gatherings called by the youth-led “Gen Z 212” movement.

The initial crackdown was severe, with over 100 individuals arrested in Rabat alone and dozens more in other cities like Casablanca, Marrakech, and Agadir. Recent developments include the arrest of 21 young people, including minors, on the Casablanca highway, while journalist Ibrahim Boufdem has also been detained. These arrests are now being followed by legal repercussions, with filmmaker Ashraf Amzil and rapper Anas Zammati scheduled to appear in court on Tuesday, September 30.

This widespread repression is thoroughly documented. Video evidence shows security forces violently breaking up protests, beating participants, and conducting arbitrary arrests. The broad range of individuals affected, from students and young professionals to journalists and cultural figures, underscores that these protests represent widespread societal demands. Among those arrested are Faroq El Mehdaoui, a young lawyer and the secretary-general of the youth organization of the opposition Democratic Left Federation who was subsequently released; women’s rights advocate Latifa Al-Makhloufi; Fatima Al-Zahraa Al-Balghiti, a known activist with Attac Morocco; prominent podcaster Hamza Al-Fadil; and members of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights. While some of those initially arrested were later released, dozens more individuals were reportedly arrested on Monday, September 29, demonstrating a continuing pattern of suppression aimed at stifling peaceful assembly and expression.

These peaceful assemblies were organized to demand fundamental social and economic rights. The protests follow recent public outrage over the tragic death of eight pregnant women in a public hospital in Agadir, a stark example of the catastrophic deterioration of public health services. This incident, coupled with the crises in quality public education and rampant unemployment, has fueled legitimate public anger. Protesters’ slogans, such as “Hospitals before stadiums,” rightly question the government’s prioritization of major sporting events, specifically its preparations to host the

2030 FIFA World Cup, over essential public services.

The authorities' response has been a familiar and alarming one: a severe security crackdown. Instead of addressing the legitimate grievances of its youth, the state has responded with batons, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation.

We are particularly alarmed by the arrest of a citizen for merely giving a peaceful interview to the media, a flagrant violation of the right to freedom of expression guaranteed by Article 25 of the Moroccan Constitution. This establishes a dangerous precedent that threatens every citizen's right to speak out. The violent dispersal of peaceful protests equally breaches the right to freedom of peaceful assembly guaranteed under Article 29.

Additionally, these actions violate Morocco's international legal obligations under Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and allows restrictions only when necessary and proportionate in a democratic society. Furthermore, they contravene the principles outlined by the UN Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 37, which emphasizes that the right to peaceful assembly is fundamental and that states have a positive duty to facilitate such gatherings, not suppress them through disproportionate force and arbitrary arrests. The suppression of peaceful protests, arbitrary arrests, and use of excessive force represent a clear breach of these fundamental human rights principles.

The government's refusal to acknowledge these protests has been compounded by a near-total blackout in official media outlets, which have deliberately ignored the widespread demonstrations to focus on other events. This censorship has further eroded public trust and created an information vacuum that fosters impunity for the security forces' actions.

We urgently call on the Moroccan authorities to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release all individuals arbitrarily arrested for their peaceful participation in protests or for exercising their right to freedom of expression.
2. Launch an independent, impartial, and effective investigation into all allegations of excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests by security forces, and ensure those responsible are held accountable.
3. Fully respect and uphold the right to freedom of peaceful assembly as guaranteed by Article 21 of the ICCPR, ensuring that any restrictions are lawful, necessary, and proportionate
4. Guarantee in all circumstances the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression for all, without fear of reprisal.
5. Publicly acknowledge the legitimate social and economic grievances raised by the protesters and initiate a genuine and inclusive national dialogue to address the crises in public health, education, and employment.

The youth of Morocco are demanding a future of dignity and justice. It is the state's obligation to listen to these calls and protect their fundamental rights, not to crush them with violence and

repression.

Signatories:

- Skyline International for Human Rights (SIHR)
- Intersection Association for Rights and Freedoms
- HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement
- Committee for Justice
- Vuka Coalition for Civic Action
- CIVICUS
- World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders
- Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rightss
- Human Rights Institute of South Africa
- Ifriqiya Association
- Partnership for Integrated Protection (PPI)
- Ligue Tunisienne des Droits de l'Homme
- Article 19

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