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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express extreme concern about the deteriorating health of academic and human rights defender Maati Monjib and demand his immediate and unconditional release. Maati Monjib started an open hunger strike on 4 March to protest his arbitrary arrest on 29 December 2020 and his sentencing in absentia to one year in prison on 27 January 2021. Maati Monjib suffers a chronic heart condition and diabetes that put his life in serious danger if his hunger strike persists for longer. On 16 March, Maati Monjib had to be transferred to the prison's health clinic after he fainted from the impact of the hunger strike. He has also visibly lost a lot of weight in a short period of time, according to his lawyer.

Maati Monjib was arbitrarily arrested from a restaurant in Rabat, on 29 December 2020, after being under a new investigation since 7 October 2020 on trumped up charges of money laundering and embezzlement against him and members of his family. While he was in pretrial detention, and without prior notification to him or his lawyers about the court hearing, the First Instance Court in Rabat sentenced him in absentia to one year in prison for a case dating back to 2015.

The Moroccan authorities had in 2015 brought bogus charges against Maati Monjib and six other defendants for their receipt of foreign funds from the non-governmental organization Free Press Unlimited to conduct training sessions for StoryMaker, a secure storytelling app for citizen journalists. The case remained open without a final judgement for five years during which Maati Monjib was summoned more than 20 times and the trial automatically adjourned over the years. It was not until Maati was arrested and held in pre-trial detention for the 2020 case, that a final judgement on the 2015 case was posted on the court's website in January 2021. There was no notification to his legal team of any hearing sessions to accord Maati Monjib the right to defence in line with fair trial standards.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Maati Monjib, as he is a prisoner of conscience solely detained for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression and association. I urge you to drop all charges against him. Pending that, I urge you to provide him with adequate health care necessary to ensure his heart condition is properly monitored and treated. I also urge you to explicitly recognize the legitimacy of human rights defenders and publicly support their work, acknowledging their contribution to the advancement of human rights and to end the criminalization of their receipt of foreign funds to pursue their human rights work.

Yours sincerely,