

Head of Government of the Kingdom of Morocco

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Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my grave concern about the sentencing of blogger and activist Fatima Karim to two years in prison and a fine for expressing her opinions in Facebook posts. Posting a photo or text on social media, even something others might see as insulting religion, should not be a crime.

On 15 July 2022, police summoned Fatima Karim for interrogation at her workplace at a sewing company in Oued Zem, a city in central Morocco about 150km from Casablanca. On 26 July 2022, Fatima Karim went to the Oued Zem judicial police station for interrogation about her Facebook posts, according to her lawyer. She was placed that same day in Khouribga prison, where she remains. On 15 August 2022, a judge in the First Instance Court of Oued Zem sentenced her to two years in prison and a 50,000MAD fine (around 4570 USD) on charges of offending Islam through electronic means, under Article 267-5 of the Penal Code, which states that anyone who undermines Islam is punishable by six months to two years in prison plus fines. On 18 August 2022, she appealed the judgement, invoking her right to freedom of expression and apologizing to anyone offended by her posts. On 13 September 2022, the Khouribga Court of Appeal upheld the verdict.

Fatima Karim's prosecution was initially triggered by a Facebook post she published on 19 June 2022, in which she shared a picture of a woman in Niqab (full face cover), with words from a Surate of Quran about virgins in paradise. The publication was accompanied by a commentary, in which she says that the author of these words must be "from the desert and specifically from Saudi Arabia." The prosecution later added 9 other satirical posts she had made mocking Islamic practices and beliefs, all from between May and July 2022. Without endorsing the language and including harmful stereotypes, Amnesty International consider the statement to have been covered by the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right to shock, alarm and offend. The ten Facebook posts used as evidence against Fatima Karim contained no calls to hate or discrimination and were merely expressions of her opinions.

Since her arrest, Fatima Karim has been held in solitary confinement in Khouribga prison, around 40km from where her family live in Oued Zem. She is not allowed out of her cell, except to call her family- which she's allowed to do every three days- and is forbidden from speaking to fellow prisoners.

In light of the above, I urge you to release Fatima Karim and to drop all charges against her. I urge you to lift or amend articles which criminalize freedom of expression from the Penal Code, including Article 267-5 which prohibits "causing harm" to Islam, the monarchy, or Morocco's "territorial integrity".

Yours sincerely,