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GERMANY

Prime Minister Mr. Aziz Akhannouch
Head of Government of the Kingdom of Morocco
Palais Royal – Touarga
Rabat
Morocco

Hamburg, March 26th 2023

Rida Benotmane

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing arbitrary detention of journalist and human rights defender Rida Benotmane. On 20 February, his conviction on charges stemming solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression was upheld on appeal. The judge also reduced his sentence from three years to 18 months in prison after upholding a lower court's conviction issued in November 2022 on charges of "insulting a body regulated by law", "insulting public officials while carrying out their duties", and "broadcasting and distributing false allegations without consent" under Articles 265, 263, and 447-2 of the Penal Code, respectively.

The charges are connected to his Facebook posts and YouTube videos dating from 2021, in which he criticised abuses by the Moroccan security forces, called for the release of political detainees and accused the Moroccan government of oppressing and marginalizing free voices and failing to respond to the demands of the Moroccan people.

Rida Benotmane is held in conditions violating the absolute prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment. He has been kept in prolonged solitary confinement in a cell of around 2.5 by 1.8m in Arjate 1 prison in the city of Salé since his detention in September 2022. His parents told Amnesty International that these conditions weigh heavily on him psychologically, despite his attempts to keep up his morale and retain his dignity.

I urge you to release Rida Benotmane immediately and unconditionally and quash his conviction and sentence as they stem solely from the exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Pending his release, he should be held in conditions meeting international standards for the treatment of prisoners and removed from solitary confinement.

I further urge you to end the prosecution of and criminal investigations against journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Yours sincerely,