



United Kingdom
National Commission for UNESCO

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

UK National Commission for UNESCO Appalled at Heavy-handed Treatment of Moroccan Journalists

London, UK – 11 January 2007. The United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO (www.unesco.org.uk) was dismayed to learn that freedom of the media is under attack in Morocco - a country that has, until now, been identified as one of the Arab world's more enlightened and progressive societies.

We are appalled that two journalists are facing up to five years in prison, and the closure of their publication, for writing and publishing a humorous article about the sort of jokes that Moroccans tell each other.

It is the very light-hearted nature of the subject matter that makes this attack on the principles of freedom of expression the more serious, for if items such as this are suppressed in such a heavy-handed manner, then the prospects of serious political debate flourishing are seriously undermined.

We support the Moroccan journalists' union - the Syndicat National de la Presse Marocaine (SNPM) - in their condemnation of the charges against the journalists. The SNPM says that the Government action is counter to Article 66 of the Moroccan Press Bill, which says only articles considered amoral can be prohibited, but not the publications themselves.

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For further information, please ring the UK National Commission for UNESCO on 020 7766 3491 or iwhite@unesco.org.uk.

Notes to Editors

- ***The UK National Commission for UNESCO*** is an independent body set up by HM Government to act as the national coordinator for UNESCO's activities and policies in the UK; and as a focal point for UNESCO HQ, HM Government and UK Civil Society. For more information, visit www.unesco.org.uk.