

28 September 2017

Morocco – Human rights defender and lawyer Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui investigated on charges of “incitement to disobedience”

On 26 September 2017, human rights defender and lawyer Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui was notified that he was being investigated on charges including “*insulting public officials*”, “*insulting the military establishment*”, and “*incitement to disobedience*” at a hearing with the public prosecution authorities at Al-Hoceima.

[Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui](#) is a human rights defender and lawyer who represents activists that face charges in relation to protests in Al-Hoceima. He is also the attorney of the family of Emad El-Attabi, who died as a result of clashes between police and protesters in July 2017. The human rights defender has denounced restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and the excessive use of force by Moroccan forces against non-violent protesters. He is also the co-founder of the **National Association for Human Rights in Morocco**.

On 26 September 2017 at a hearing with the public prosecution authorities in Al-Hoceima, human rights defender and lawyer Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui was notified that he was being investigated on charges including “*insulting public officials*”, “*insulting the military establishment*”, and “*incitement to disobedience*”. As evidence, the public prosecution cited over 150 Facebook posts, many of which were critical of the government for police brutality and violent suppression of demonstrations. Security and intelligence resources were also cited.

On 18 September 2017 at 10.00 am, Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui's attorney attended a summons at Al Hoceima police station on his client's behalf. As Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui lives in Tétouan, several hours away from Al Hoceima, his attorney appeared in his place. The investigating authorities suggested to the attorney that the human rights defender is being investigated for “*incitement*”.

On 7 September, 2017 Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui received a summons from the Moroccan Public Prosecutions Office. He was told that he was being investigated in relation to his legal representation of Al-Hoceima activists. The human rights defender was previously interrogated on 11 August 2017 at Tétouan police station. He had received a summons on 9 August during a court hearing visit with family members to request the retrieval of the body of Emad El-Attabi.

His summons and questioning follow his criticism on Facebook of the repression of Al-Hoceima protests, which were held in response to a speech in which King Mohammed VI described protesters and those criticizing government development policies as “*collaborating against the homeland*”. The King responded to the protests stating that law enforcement agents were “*showing restraint and commitment to the rule of law as they maintained security and stability*”.

During the protests, police forces used tear gas, resulting in the hospitalization of several protesters, including Emad El-Attabi, who died after being hit by a tear gas canister on 20 July 2017. Police were also recorded punching protesters, including during other earlier demonstrations.

Front Line Defenders condemns the judicial harassment of Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui, which appears to be the result of his work as a human rights lawyer and the exercise of his freedom of expression.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Morocco to:

1. Drop all charges and immediately cease all further harassment of Abdessadeq El Bouchtaoui, as Front Line Defenders believes that this is solely as a result of his legitimate work in defence of human rights;
2. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Morocco and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.