

DOIW 2023 – Take Action for Soulayman Raissouni (Morocco)

Name: Soulayman Raissouni

Occupation: Journalist

Situation: Imprisoned

#SoulaymanRaissouni #ImprisonedWriter

Background

Soulayman Raissouni is a prominent Moroccan journalist and the former editor-in-chief of the [now-defunct](#) opposition newspaper *Akhbar al-Youm*. He gained recognition for his editorials critical of the Moroccan authorities.

On May 22, 2020, Moroccan police [arrested](#) Raissouni on charges of 'sexual assault' and 'enforced confinement.' He vehemently denied these allegations, asserting they were retaliatory and politically motivated.

Raissouni endured nearly a year of arbitrary pre-trial detention before the Casablanca Court of Appeal [sentenced](#) him on July 9, 2021 to five years in prison, and imposed a fine of 100,000 Moroccan Dirhams (equivalent to approximately \$10,000). His trial was marred by irregularities, and the sentence was delivered in his absence and that of his defence team. Raissouni's family reported that the Moroccan authorities prevented him from attending several trial hearings, and rejected all his requests for release pending trial. Additionally, they confirmed that during his detention, Raissouni was denied visitation rights and, on few occasions, access to legal counsel.

According to the case file examined by PEN International, Raissouni's arrest was prompted by online accusations of sexual assault. The case file disclosed that the accuser made these allegations using a different name and never specifically identified Raissouni as the perpetrator. Nevertheless, local [media](#) outlets with close government [affiliations](#), initiated a smear [campaign](#) against Raissouni amplifying these accusations, prior to his arrest and subsequent detention.

An [investigation](#) by the non-profit project Forbidden Stories published in 2021, revealed that Raissouni had been [targeted](#) for surveillance using the notorious Pegasus spyware for a two-year period, starting in 2017, alongside other prominent Moroccan journalists, including Omar Radi and Taoufik Bouachrine.

In August the same year, Raissouni ended his 122-day hunger strike, which he had initiated to protest his prolonged pre-trial detention and unfair trial. His family informed PEN International

that the hunger strike had caused him significant weight loss and adversely affected his overall health, particularly his ability to walk.

In July, prison authorities published a CCTV video of Raissouni in prison, without his knowledge while he was wearing little clothing. In the video, he [appeared](#) using crutches and to have lost significant weight. His family considered the release of video to be another attempt by the authorities to defame and intimidate him. While in prison, authorities also denied Raissouni access to reading and writing materials for prolonged period, and he remains unable to receive and send letters freely. In May 2022, prison authorities confiscated his diaries and a draft novel.

In February 2022, the Casablanca Court of Appeal [upheld](#) the five years sentence.

In July 2023, despite international pressure and criticism over his arbitrary detention and unfair trial, the Rabat Court of Cassation [rejected](#) Raissouni's final appeal, upholding his unjust prison sentence.

In July 2022, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention [concluded](#) that the arrest and detention of Raissouni were arbitrary, raising grave concerns over his physical and psychological well-being. Furthermore, in January 2023, the European Parliament adopted resolution [2023/2506\(RSP\)](#), urging the Moroccan authorities to uphold freedom of expression and press freedom, ensure fair trials and due process for all imprisoned journalists, including Raissouni, secure their release, and cease their harassment and that of their lawyers and families.

Since May 2020, Raissouni's wife, screenwriter and journalist Kholoud Muktari has faced a systematic smear campaign by pro-government media due to her activism on behalf of her husband. The campaign, which PEN International is closely monitoring, intensified following the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention's opinion ([31/2022](#)), recognising the arbitrary nature of Raissouni's detention, aligning with Muktari's claims of his rights violations.

PEN International [believes](#) that Raissouni's conviction resulted from an unfair trial, and that he is being targeted because of the content of his writings. The organization is also deeply concerned about Raissouni's physical and psychological well-being.

For more information on Morocco other imprisoned Moroccan journalists, please click [here](#).

Take Action

PEN International considers Soulaïman Raissouni's imprisonment to be a clear breach of his right to freedom of expression and calls for his immediate and unconditional release. This is what you can do:

Advocacy

Write to the **Moroccan authorities**, calling on them to:

- Release Raissouni immediately and unconditionally and drop all charges against him.
- Ensure Raissouni is allowed to receive and send letters, has his confiscated writings returned, and receives adequate medical care, pending his release.

Further calling on the Moroccan authorities to end the persecution and detention of journalists and writers simply on the basis of the content of their writing or alleged affiliations, and to immediately release all those imprisoned for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

Send appeals to:

*****Please send appeals immediately to:**

-Cabinet royal

Palais Royal Touarga, Rabat
+212 5377-65400

****Send copies to the Embassy of Morocco in your own country.**

* Embassy addresses may be found [here](#):

- **For appeals sent from the UK:**

S.E.M. ABOUDRAR ABDESSELAM

49 Queen's Gate Gardens London SW7 5NE

FAX: 0207 225 3862

E-MAIL: ambalondres@maec.gov.ma

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MOROCCOinUK>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MoroccoIntheUK/>

Please reach out to your Ministry of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic representatives in Morocco, calling on them to raise Soulayman Raissouni's case in bilateral fora.

Please inform PEN International of any action you take and any responses you receive.

Social media

Raise awareness about his case on social media, using the sample messages below and the hashtags #SoulaymanRaissouni #ImprisonedWriter, tagging @pen_int and @Pen_mena

Facebook

📣 Day of the #ImprisonedWriter's Call for Action: Moroccan journalist #SoulaymanRaissouni is languishing in prison following an unfair trial, targeted because of his writings. We must unite to demand his immediate and unconditional release.

Twitter

Day of the #ImprisonedWriter's Call for Action: Moroccan journalist #SoulaymanRaissouni is languishing in prison following an unfair trial, targeted because his writings. He must be released immediately and unconditionally. Take action with us.

Visuals

Please share this graphic on social media to highlight Soulayman Raissouni case.

Solidarity

Messages of solidarity to Soulayman Raissouni can be sent using the form [here](#).

Please consider electing him as an honorary member of your Centre.

Outreach

We also encourage you to highlight Soulayman Raissouni's case, and the state of freedom of expression in Morocco, by:

- Publishing articles and opinion pieces in your national or local press.
- Organising public events, press conferences and demonstrations.
- Visiting PEN International's handles on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#), and PEN MENA's handles on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) for retweets, likes, comments and sharing our posts for wider outreach.

Please keep us informed of your activities. Messages can be sent to **Sabrina Tucci**, PEN International's Communications and Campaigns Manager, Sabrina.Tucci@pen-international.org and **Mina Thabet**, Head of PEN International's Mina Region, Mina.Thabet@pen-international.org