

Hirak activists sentenced to 230 years in “judicial massacre”

Over a year after the start of the largest political trial of Mohammed VI's reign, and after a marathon of over 80 hearings, the criminal court in Casablanca handed out its ruthless verdict on 26 June: the activists of the popular movement in the Rif region of Morocco were sentenced to a total of 230 years in jail.

The leaders of the Hirak (movement) are accused of “plotting against the state” and taking part in unauthorised demonstrations. Nasser al-Zefzafi, Nabil Ahemjik, Samir Aghid and Wassim al Boustani were all sentenced to 20 years in jail while 51 others got between 15 and 3 years in jail.

Prominent human rights activists Khadija al Riyadi described the sentences against the Rif activists as “a judicial massacre, a cruel and crude revenge against the activists, their families and the entire region.”

Dozens of activists were arrested last year after the mass demonstrations that shook al-Hoceima and other towns, provoked by the crushing of fish-seller Mohsen Fakhri in a garbage truck by the police in October 2016.

A wave of struggle swept through the Rif region in northern Morocco, before reaching other parts of the country and sparking solidarity demonstrations by Moroccan workers in western European countries.

The participants in the Rif movement did not only condemn the state's policies of repression and austerity, they also formulated their own economic, social and democratic demands that would improve the population's livelihood.

The Rif region is particularly plagued by unemployment (60% of graduates are unemployed against 'only' 26% nationally), the degradation of public and social services like healthcare and education as well as decrepit public infrastructure.

The popular movement created its own structures (notably through local elected committees), and organized its media presence in order to counter the regime's propaganda which accused it of promoting secession and of acting as the agent of foreign powers.

The detained activists rejected all those accusations outright before the judge, stating that the Hirak was a peaceful movement against corruption and for the development of their region



to ensure a dignified life for all its inhabitants. They then announced their boycott of further proceedings because of the tribunal's “lack of objectivity”, its dishonesty and the “guilty until proven innocent” mentality under which it operated.

It is estimated that 450 people are currently jailed for having taken part in the Hirak. Numerous NGOs and rights organisations have demanded their release.

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With its obvious neglect for the criteria of fair judgement, this political trial is part of an attempt by the Moroccan regime to terrorise popular movements and struggles against despotism, exploitation and austerity.

A wave of repression is sweeping the country, targeting the democratic political movement, rights organizations, students and the unemployed.

The state's authoritarian nature and its helplessness in confronting an ever exacerbating economic crisis means it is incapable of responding even to the

most moderate of popular demands.

The regime has tried without success to contain the popular movement in al-Hoceima by sacking ministers and senior civil servants; it is now attempting to use this political trial in order to break the will of the popular movements, in the absence of political forces capable of organizing the opposition to dictatorship and austerity.

Despite the repression, the announcement of the sentences triggered protests of thousands in al-Hoceima and other towns in the Rif, while hundreds rallied outside the parliament in the capital Rabat, chanting “take us all to jail.”

Take action

- **Write urgent letters of protest to the Moroccan embassy in your country calling for the immediate release of the Hirak political prisoners**
- **Call on your trade union branch to pass a resolution in solidarity with the Hirak prisoners**

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