

Moroccan court convicts local publisher of criminal defamation

Moroccan authorities should drop all charges against *Akhbar al-Youm* columnist and publisher Taoufik Bouachrine on appeal, and allow him to work without fear of reprisal, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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A Casablanca court on February 12 convicted Bouachrine of criminal defamation in a lawsuit filed by two government ministers and ordered him to pay a fine of 45 million Moroccan centimes (US\$49,000), according to [news reports](#) and a Facebook [post](#) from the journalist's account.

In an October 2015 [column](#), Bouachrine wrote that the Moroccan businessman and Agriculture and Fisheries Minister [Aziz Akhannouch](#) and the Economy and Finance Minister Mohamed Boussaid "tricked" then-Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane into approving a law that would transfer the financial authority over a federal development fund from the prime minister to the agriculture and fisheries minister.

In response, Akhannouch and Boussaid sued for defamation, according to [news reports](#) and the Facebook [post](#) from the journalist's account. Bouachrine [told journalists](#) that he is going to appeal the court's decision.

"Journalists should never face criminal charges for doing their job," CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator Sherif Mansour said from Washington D.C. "Moroccan authorities should drop all charges against Taoufik

Bouachrine, not contest his appeal, and abolish laws that allow for public officials to file criminal charges against critical journalists.”

Government spokesperson Mustapha Khalfi did not immediately respond to CPJ's email requesting comment.

“I am a journalist. I publish true and accurate news regardless of who would benefit or not benefit from them, because people have the right to know what happens in their government,” Bouachrine [wrote](#) in a column, quoting his own response to the accusations in front of the judge.

Bouachrine is not the first journalist who was convicted in lawsuits filed by Moroccan officials. In 2017, Akhannouch filed a criminal defamation lawsuit against independent news website *Badil* editor-in-chief [Hamid al-Mahdaoui](#) and the site's reporter, Hicham al-Omrani, in response to an interview they conducted with a political analyst who criticized Akhannouch, according to [newsreports](#). Akhannouch later dropped the charges on appeal, the reports stated. In another case, a Moroccan court ordered the privately owned website *Goud* in 2015 to pay 500,000 Moroccan dirhams to the king's private secretary, Mounir el-Majidi, for accusing him of corruption in an article, CPJ [documented](#) at the time.

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