

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/morocco-environmental-citizen-journalist-21-02-2013,44105.html>

Middle East/North Africa - Morocco - 2013

Trumped-up charge

Environmental citizen-journalist gets 10 months in prison

21 February 2013

[Read in Arabic \(بالعربية\)](#)

Reporters Without Borders condemns the 10-month jail sentence that was passed last week on citizen-journalist **Mohamed Attaoui** on a spurious charge of "working as a local official despite being suspended" and calls for his conditional release pending the outcome of his appeal.

"The authorities have been harassing Attaoui for years, above all because of his commitment to defending the environment," Reporters Without Borders said. "Now he has again been arrested and convicted on a trumped-up charge to prevent him from drawing attention to the mafia-like practices of local officials."

Attaoui was arrested on 21 January in his home town, the rural municipality of Tounfite (in the north-central region of Meknès), while photographing homes that are unfit for habitation for a report he intended to post online [videos](#) he posted before his arrest.

The president and general secretary of the "Tounfite Group" (a grass-roots association to which Attaoui belongs) were also arrested and have been sentenced to a year and eight months in prison respectively.

Following his arrest, Attaoui was placed in solitary confinement on the prison director's orders and was not allowed to receive a visit from his wife until 18 February, four days he was given the 10-month jail sentence.

Attaoui was previously convicted in March 2010, when he was the Arabic-language daily *Al-Monataf's* regional correspondent, and when he headed the Future for Cedar and Mountain Sheep Association and worked for the Tounfite municipal administration.

A court in Midelt (in the Eastern Atlas, southeast of Rabat) sentenced him to two years in prison on a trumped-up charge of extorting 1,000 dirhams (90 euros). He was detained for 45 days before being released on bail pending the outcome of his appeal.

Reporters Without Borders drew attention to the case at the time, accusing the authorities of trying to prevent him from exposing the "cedar mafia" responsible for the illegal felling of cedar in the Eastern Atlas. The case was also mentioned in a June 2010 report on environmental journalism called ["Deforestation and pollution: high-risk subjects"](#).

The court that was supposed to hear Attaoui's appeal against his 2010 conviction kept on postponing hearings and, in the end, never issued a decision.

Attaoui meanwhile filed a complaint with the Midelt prosecutor's office on 22 March 2010 accusing four Midelt police detectives of forgery and abduction. Although there were witnesses and hard evidence to support his allegations, the case was closed on 24 June 2010.

In a letter to justice minister Mustafa Ramid on 10 October 2012, Reporters Without Borders drew attention to the unsuccessful attempts to reactivate this complaint and requested an independent and impartial investigation into all the "acts of intimidation and the strategy of reducing this journalist to silence with complete impunity" in violation of Morocco's international

obligations.

Attaoui was suspended from his municipal administration job in Tounfite as a reprisal in August 2012.

You can download those documents on our website :

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