

Royal pardon for Internet user, condemned to three years of jail for creating spoof Facebook profile for prince

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MIDDLE EAST - NORTH AFRICA

Reporters Without Borders welcomes **Fouad Mourtada's** release after receiving a royal pardon yesterday for Aid Mawlid Nabaoui, the holiday marking the birth of the Prophet Mohammed. Mourtada's had been serving a three-year jail sentence for “usurping the identity” of King Mohammed's brother, Prince Moulay Rachid, by creating a “false profile” in his name on the social-networking website Facebook. “This is a great relief,” Reporters Without Borders said. “Mourtada will be able to spend this holiday with his family tomorrow after 43 days in prison. Nonetheless, we regret that his release is the result of a royal pardon rather than a fair verdict and sentence. Moroccan bloggers will not be able to forget his imprisonment when they compose their blog entries.” Mourtada's conviction on 22 February [had raised a great deal of concern in the Moroccan blogosphere](#). He was arrested at his home on 5 February. ----- **26.02 - Moroccan bloggers worried after “disproportionate” three-year jail term for Internet user who created spoof Facebook profile** Reporters Without Borders voiced concern today about the three-year prison sentence which a Casablanca court imposed on 27-year-old Internet user **Fouad Mourtada** on 22 February for “usurping the identity” of King Mohammed's brother, Prince Moulay Rachid, by creating a “false profile” in his name on the social-networking website Facebook. “This is the first time a Moroccan has been convicted for an online offence and Mourtada was the victim of a summary trial,” the press freedom organisation said. “We are worried about the effect on freedom of expression on the Moroccan Internet as all of the country's bloggers will feel targeted. This disproportionate sentence has shocked the Moroccan blogger community, which is one of the biggest in the region. [A popular and well respected blogger already decided to stop blogging out of fear for his safety after what happened to Fouad Mourtada](#).” Plain-clothes police arrested Mourtada at his home on 5 February and held him incommunicado for 36 hours before transferring him to Casablanca's Oukacha prison the next day. Reporters Without Borders wonders how the police identified Mourtada. “Did the police get his computer's IP address? And if so, how? We have asked the ISP, Maroc Telecom, in which the French company Vivendi is a shareholder, to provide us with the relevant information.” When he saw his family on 12 February, he told them: “I did indeed create this account on 15 January. It remained online for several days until someone closed it down. There are so many celebrity profiles on Facebook. I never thought that by creating a profile of His Royal Highness Prince Moulay Rachid that I was doing him any harm. Also, I did not send anyone a message from this account. It was just a joke (...) I am not a criminal.” With around 4 million Internet users, the Moroccan blogosphere is one of the most active in all of the Maghreb. [Call for Mourtada's release](#)