

Dear Soulaïman Raïssouni,

Learning the details of the charges against you and your trial, I could not avoid the feeling a sense of déjà vu. False accusations have been used against political opponents and dissenters in both ancient and more recent history.

I am now teaching the political history of Ukrainian literature at Columbia University and I tell my students about an entire generation of young Ukrainian writers from the 1920s and 1930s who were falsely charged and executed during Stalin's era. The physical destruction of that generation – and we are talking about thousands and thousands of Ukrainian intellectuals – predetermined, the development of Ukraine and the entire Soviet Union as territories in which the very concepts of freedom and democracy were scorched.

Until your unjust arrest, your work at Akhbar al Youm gave hope and clarity to many in Morocco. What has happened to you and your falsely convicted colleagues is extremely dangerous for the future of Morocco. The world must hold a light up to these political processes and demand justice.

Twelve years ago, I stopped associating Morocco exclusively with Michael Curtiz's film "Casablanca", and gave more attention to the democratic reforms promised by King Mohammed VI. Now I watch what is happening in your country with increasing concern.

Democratic reforms are not possible without a free and independent press. Your trial, like the trial against your niece, journalist Hajar Raïssouni, shows that the current representatives of political power in Morocco are following in Stalin's footsteps and those of other authoritarian leaders. I am afraid to imagine what you went through during your hunger strike. I'm afraid to imagine what you, a professional journalist, feel now with your access to books, paper and pen blocked.

As an author of novels and published diaries, I know the value of both diary entries and the chance to jot down ideas that come into my head in preparation for a new chapter or article. The fact that the draft of your new novel and your personal diaries were confiscated arouses indignation and despair in my soul.

I believe that justice will prevail. However, sometimes the path to justice can be extremely long. I want to believe, and in fact, I do believe that your path to justice, to freedom, and the reversal of an unjust sentence will be short. I believe this because of the obvious violations during the investigation and trial, confirmed in July 2022 by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, and because the civilized world is reacting more and more sharply to infringements of press freedom in countries that publicly declare themselves to be democratic states where human rights and political freedoms are respected.

I wish you a speedy return to your desk, to your computer, to paper and pen, to the opportunity to freely and publicly express your opinion.

Yours sincerely,

Andrey Kurkov