

Morocco: LGBTQ+ activist convicted of Blasphemy and insulting Islamic Religion

September 5, 2025

On Wednesday, September 3, 2025, the King's Prosecutor's Office at the Court of Rabat, Morocco, arrested Ibtissame Lachgar, known for her commitment to defending individual freedoms and as an activist of the LGBTQ+ community, accusing her of having published a photo wearing a T-shirt with the words “الله is lesbian” (Allah is lesbian) and summoning her directly to trial¹.

Although presented by the media as a case of repression against members of the LGBTQ+ community, the proceedings stem from a violation of existing laws protecting religious sentiment.

In fact, during the press release, the Prosecutor in charge declared that the opening of an investigation and the pre-trial detention of the woman was ordered in accordance with the law of the Kingdom, following blasphemous expressions contained in the published photo and a comment containing offenses to Islamic religion.

The court ruling, however, has caused considerable outcry on social media and among Moroccan human rights activists, who have stigmatized it, accusing it of violating freedom of expression and freedom of thought, values protected by the *Shari'a*². It must be noted, in this regard, that the Kingdom of Morocco is one of the most advanced Islamic countries in promoting legal and social reforms aimed at defending individual rights and freedoms, ranging from the protection of women and minors, to respect for equal opportunities, to the defence of religious minorities³.

Indeed, numerous comments have been posted online and initiatives have been undertaken in “rainbow” communities in support of the activist, both in Morocco and in Europe and Italy. In particular, many internet users have expressed solidarity with the woman, arguing that she had simply published an opinion, without violence or incitement, and have downplayed her action, placing it within the realm of freedom of expression and of legitimate demands for the rights of feminists and homosexuals.

As evidence of this particular defence reconstruction of the incident, Ibtissame Lachgar herself intervened, declaring during the hearing following her arrest that the slogan on the T-shirt she was

¹ Cfr. <https://www.open.online/2025/09/05/morocco-carcere-femminista-ibtissam-lachgar-maglietta-allah-lesbica/>

² See MOHAMMAD HASHIM KAMALI, *Freedom of Expression in Islam*, Islamic Text Society, Cambridge, 1997.

³ Among others, see OSIRE GLACIER, *Les droits humains au Maroc, entre discours officiels, luttes citoyennes et réalités de terrain*, Editions La Croisée des chemins, Casablanca, 2025; ABDELLAH BOUSSOUF, *Une monarchie citoyenne en terre d'Islam*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2018; BUREAU DE L'ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'EDUCATION, LA SCIENCE ET LA CULTURE, UNIVERSITE HASAN II, *Le genre et l'université au Maroc*, Unesco, Rabat, 2018; ANDREA MARTINEZ, GAËLLE GILLOT, *Femmes, printemps arabes et revendications citoyennes*, IRD Editions, Montpellier, 2017; SUSAN SLYOMOVICS, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2005. For a more general and non-polarized view on Morocco only, see SHEHNAZ HAQQANI, *Feminism, Tradition and Change in Contemporary Islam. Negotiating Islamic Law and Gender*, Oneworld Publications, London, 2024.

wearing was nothing more than a feminist slogan that has been around for years, spreading against sexist ideologies and violence against women, and that has no connection to Islam.

On closer inspection, however, and differently from what has been claimed, through the post published on the social network “X” on July 31, 2025, which was then removed, the activist did not express herself properly in terms of protecting the rights of the LGBTQ+ community or claiming the right to express one’s thoughts, but rather in an clear expression against religious sentiment and in particular against Islam: “*Au Maroc je me balade avec des t-shirts avec des messages contre les religions, l’islam etc. On fait des collages avec @MALImaroc. Vous nous fatiguez avec vos bondieuseries, vos accusations. Oui l’islam, comme toute idéologie religieuse, est FASCISTE. PHALLOCRATE ET MISOGYNE*”⁴.

Indeed, the Moroccan Constitution recognizes the right to express one’s opinion, but free expression is subject to compliance with the law, which establishes its modalities and limits. Accordingly, the exercise of this freedom must not violate public order, State security, or public morals. Furthermore, on this point, the Kingdom’s Penal Code, while generally upholding the right to express one’s idea and the principle of non-discrimination for one’s opinions, punishes anyone who expresses opinions that violate Islam. Furthermore, the Moroccan Press and Publishing Code, in Articles 31 and 71, provides for the application of a fine to publications and electronic media deemed guilty of offending Islam, with the possible application of the additional sanction of journal suspension and account blackout⁵.

Therefore, the “rainbow” claims appear to have little or no bearing on the case at hand, since the protection of religious sentiment is at the heart of the matter, through the protection provided for in Moroccan law. And it is on this specific point that the analysis must focus, in order to objectively assess what happened.

Following the hearing of the trial, the defendant was sentenced to 30 months in prison and a fine of 50,000 dirhams for violating Article 267-5 of the Penal Code, which punishes anyone who attacks the Islamic religion⁶. The penalty can be increased if the offense is committed publicly, via electronic media or a social media platform. Claiming to send anti-religious messages and publicly criticizing Islam (as

⁴ See https://www.buffingtonpost.fr/international/article/allab-est-lesbienne-le-t-shirt-de-cette-militante-feministe-n-a-pas-du-tout-plus-aux-autorites-marocaines_253477.html

⁵ See Editorial and Press Code, adopted with law n. 88-13 del 2016 and promulgated by decree n. 1-16-122 del 10/08/2016.

https://mjcc.gov.ma/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Code_Presse2016_FR-1.pdf

⁶ See. art. 267-5 of Moroccan Penal Code, introduced by law n. 73-15 in date 18/07/2016, promulgated by decree n. 1-16-104/2016 and published on the Official Bulletin n. 6522 in date 1/12/2016: “Anyone who attacks the Islamic religion, the monarchy, or incites others to attack the territorial integrity of the Kingdom will be punished with imprisonment from six months to two years and a fine of 20,000 to 200,000 dirhams, or one of these two penalties.

The penalty is increased from two to five years’ imprisonment and from 50,000 to 500,000 dirhams, or one of these penalties, when the acts referred to in the first paragraph are committed through speeches, shouts, or threats made in public places or during public meetings, or through posters displayed to the public, or through sale, distribution, or any other means that meet the publicity requirement, including electronic, paper, and audiovisual media”. (Author’s translation). Cfr. *مجموعة القوانين الجنائية-المسطرة وقانون الجنائي-القانون*.pdf

fascist, phallocratic, and misogynistic), as Ibtissame Lachgar did in her post, was deemed a direct and explicit attack on Islam. This conduct is punishable by law, regardless of its perpetrator (male/female), regardless of sexual orientation or inclination (heterosexual/homosexual), and for any reason (expression of opinion/claim of rights/protection of freedoms).

But there is more.

Certainly, if the conduct has been classified, from a legal perspective, as a typical offense against the Islamic religion, provided for and punished by art. 267-5 of the Criminal Code, it also lends itself to analysis from a theological perspective.

Indeed, attention must be paid to the expressions used in the post published by the activist, who associated a specific characteristic with God, that of being “lesbian”. According to Islamic religious law, this constitutes a grave violation, not so much for the quality it is intended to attribute to Him, but for the fact of doing so. God has 99 names and attributes⁷, some attributable to specific adjectives, such as “the Merciful” (الرحيم), “the Clement” (الرحيم), through which believers can invoke Him depending on the moment or specific situation, as the Quran invites us to do: “*God possesses the most beautiful names, and you invoke Him with those names (...)*”⁸. Assigning other names or further attributes to God, such as “lesbian”, means associating others with Him, and this violates the fundamental concept of *tawhid*, the unity and uniqueness of God, the absolute pillar of monotheism in its ultimate declination⁹. Whoever acts in this way is called an associate (مُشْرِك), a grave sin subsumed by some theological schools under blasphemy¹⁰, crystallized in the Quran: “*And most of them believe in God only by associating other deities with Him*”; “*(...) whoever gives God companions, God will close the doors of the Garden, and his abode will be the Fire (...)*”¹¹.

In conclusion, despite the demands of LGBTQ+ community activists and human rights defenders, it should not be surprising that in an Islamic Country like the Kingdom of Morocco, there remains a high level of concern for religious sentiment, which is also reflected in criminal protections that are not open to provocation or offenses, especially if deliberately conveyed in public or on platforms intended for the widest possible dissemination.

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⁷ On the specific point, see HENRY CORBIN, *Storia della filosofia islamica, dalle origini ai nostri giorni*, Adelphi, Milano, 1991; Stefano Allievi, “*A Dio appartengono i nomi più belli*”. *Come pregano i musulmani*, Edizioni Dehoniane, Bologna, 2015.

⁸ Quran VII, 180. For the Quran, we refer to: ALBERTO VENTURA (edited by), IDA ZILIO-GRANDI (translated by), *Il Corano*, Mondadori, Milano, 2010.

⁹ Even though *tawhid* is not a Quranic term, the unity and uniqueness of God is a principle omnipresent in the Quran, elevated to dogma and directly linked to the *shabada* (the profession of faith). For further information, see among many others, AL-JUWAYNI, *Al-Shamil fi Usul al-Din*, Dar al-Ma’arif, Alexandria, 1969; SHAHRASTANI, *Nihayat al-akdam fi Ilm al-Kalam*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1934; A. J. WENSINCK, *The Muslim creed: its genesis and historical development*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1932.

¹⁰ See A.G. OUDAH SHAHEED, *Criminal Law of Islam*, Adam Publisher & Distributor, New Delhi, 2005, III, pp. 752 ss.

¹¹ Respectively, Quran XII, 106; Cor. V, 72.

Source: Open.online, September, 5th 2025

<https://www.open.online/2025/09/05/marocco-carcere-femminista-ibtissam-lachgar-maglietta-allah-lesbica/>

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