

WAN-IFRA condemns Moroccan news mag closure

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) has condemned the closure of the Moroccan news magazine *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* and the apparent use of the judicial system to silence an independent publication.



Le Journal had incurred crippling libel fines and debts to the Moroccan tax authorities. A Casablanca commercial appeals court ruled on 26 January that *Le Journal's* publishing group, Trimedia, had fallen into bankruptcy.

Bailiffs entered the news magazine's offices as the latest issue was being readied for press, seizing its assets and effectively turning staff out into the street.

Le Journal had been ordered to pay 3 million dirhams (US\$354,000) in damages after a defamation case filed by Claude Moniquet, head of the Brussels-based European Strategic Intelligence and Security Centre. The organisation had published a report on the disputed Western Sahara that *Le Journal* claimed closely reflected the official Moroccan government position.

In September 2009, the decision to fine *Le Journal* was upheld by the Moroccan Supreme Court and effectively condemned the publication to financial ruin.

Le Journal has established a reputation for being a leading and persistent critical voice in the Moroccan press. As the country moved towards a more open and democratic society, the publication's irreverent tone and stinging analysis sought to keep authorities in-check regarding their commitments to tackling corruption, transparency and human rights abuses.

Le Journal's co-founder and former managing director, Abou Bakr Jamaï, has claimed that Trimedia could have paid creditors "had the authorities refrained from regularly ordering advertisers to boycott the publication."

In a statement, WAN-IFRA condemned the use of the judicial system to suppress freedom of the press and to silence critical analysis. The global organisation said the allegations of financial "blacklisting" regarding advertising were apparently carried out to suppress unwanted criticism.

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