

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 27, 2025

Daniel Nadel  
Director & Principal Deputy to the Ambassador at Large  
Office of International Religious Freedom  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Re: Urgent appeal to intervene in the prosecution of Ibtissame “Betty” Lachgar in Morocco

Dear Director Nadel:

On behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), the nation’s largest association of freethinkers representing more than 42,000 members across the United States, we write to urgently request that the Office of International Religious Freedom take immediate action regarding the imprisonment and upcoming trial of Moroccan feminist and human rights activist Ibtissame “Betty” Lachgar.

Ms. Lachgar, a longtime defender of women’s rights, LGBTQ+ equality, and freedom of conscience, has been arrested and absurdly charged with “insulting Islam” for sharing a photograph of herself wearing a T-shirt that read “Allah is lesbian.”<sup>1</sup> Her trial is scheduled to take place next week, and she faces up to five years in prison under Morocco’s blasphemy laws. She is currently detained in harsh conditions despite being a cancer survivor in need of consistent medical treatment, posing grave risks to her health and life.

Meanwhile, those who have harassed and threatened her with death and sexual violence online have remained free and unpunished. This stark double standard highlights the systemic discrimination, persecution and violence faced by dissidents in Morocco under the guise of “protecting religion.”

Blasphemy laws are a relic of the Dark Ages that violate basic fundamental human rights of free speech and religious freedom. They are a direct violation of internationally recognized human rights, including freedom of thought, conscience, expression, and belief as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Morocco is a signatory. The U.S. government has consistently opposed such laws, recognizing their role in fueling repression, silencing dissent, and endangering vulnerable communities.<sup>2</sup> In fact, a resolution calling on the State Department to prioritize the global repeal of blasphemy, heresy and apostasy laws passed unanimously in the Senate and by overwhelming

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2025/08/237451/feminist-activist-ibtissam-lachgar-faces-trial-in-detention-for-blasphemy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/releases-statements/uscifr-releases-updated-blasphemy-factsheet-and-blasphemy-law>

majority in the House in 2020. The resolution also calls on governments of countries that enforce such laws to amend or repeal them and to release any one imprisoned pursuant to them.<sup>3</sup>

True religious freedom by definition must include the right to dissent. No one should ever face government-imposed penalties for speaking for or against a religion, a sect, dogma or religious imagery.

We therefore respectfully urge the Office of International Religious Freedom to:

- Publicly call for the immediate release of Ibtissame “Betty” Lachgar.
- Press the Moroccan government to drop all blasphemy charges against her.
- Condemn Morocco’s criminalization of apostasy, blasphemy and same-sex relationships under its Penal Code as violations of fundamental freedoms.
- Place Morocco under greater scrutiny until it repeals laws that punish individuals for exercising freedom of conscience and expression.

By taking a strong and public stand, your office can help save the life and liberty of a courageous activist while reaffirming the United States’ commitment to religious freedom for all — including the right to reject, lampoon or criticize religion, or, as in Ms. Lachgar’s case, to speculate harmlessly about the love lives of deities.

As FFRF has long pointed out, blasphemy is a victimless crime, but blasphemy laws create many innocent victims.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to hearing from you about what steps you are taking in helping to secure justice for Ms. Lachgar and in pressing Morocco and other governments to end the criminalization of nonbelief and dissent.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-presidents  
ALG/DB:cal

Cc: Chargée d’Affaires Aimee Cutrona *via fax*: (212) 0537 637 201

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/512?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22hres512%22%7D>