

Middle East Online, 2006-01-06

**Moroccan king announces amends for father's rights abuses
King Mohammed VI wants to give tangible demonstration of his
strong support for consolidating truth, equity, reconciliation.**

RABAT - Morocco's King Mohammed VI called Friday for the state to make amends for human rights abuses committed under his father's rule by implementing the recommendations of a special reconciliation body.

In a televised speech to the nation he said he wanted to give a tangible demonstration of his "strong support for consolidating truth, equity and reconciliation."

At the same time, he added, this did not mean "we should forget the past, because history cannot be forgotten."

It was a question of "a collective pardon which is one of the pillars of institutional reform, a profound reform in order to help our country free itself from the failures of the past with regard to political and civil rights."

The king said he was charging the Consultative Council for Human Rights (CCDH) with ensuring the implementation of the recommendations of the Equity and Reconciliation Panel (IER) which called on the state at the end of November to apologise for the abuses and end impunity for those responsible.

The constitution should also be changed to ensure a separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary, the IER said after staging public hearings of former political prisoners and relatives of those who died.

The king held back from making the apology himself, but a source close to the IER said Prime Minister Driss Jettou would do so.

The IER, a 17-member independent panel set up by the king in November 2003, was tasked with probing three decades of rights abuses, including killings, disappearances and torture, between 1960 and 1999, the reign of King Hassan II. It dealt with 16,000 cases, of which more than 9,000 will be eligible for compensation, and resolved the fate of 593 missing persons.

The king's decision to set up such a commission, which reported back to him after a series of investigations and opening of mass graves around the country, including inside the notorious Tazmamart prison in the south, was the first of its kind in the Arab world.

Hundreds of families had reported atrocities and disappearances during what were known as the "leaden years", when Hassan II was a staunch ally of the

west but maintained power at home surrounded by hardline security and interior ministers and secret services while keeping a multi-party system going.

The panel was headed by a former political detainee, Driss Benzekri, and included several other prominent victims of the former state apparatus, gradually dismantled once the new king came to the throne on the death of his father.

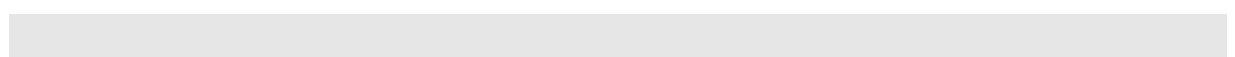
It called for "the primacy of international human rights law over Moroccan law, the separation of powers, the total independence of the judiciary, the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial."

It proposed a legal ban on "forced disappearances, arbitrary detention, genocide and other crimes against humanity, torture and all other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

The CCDH, set up by Hassan in 1990, is also headed by Benzekri, who was voted the country's most influential man of the year, ahead of the king, in a poll published in a Moroccan weekly at the end of 2005, provoking a stormy reaction from monarchists.

Before his speech the king invited to the palace families of victims of the "leaden years", when he expressed his sympathy for them.

Longstanding problems had been settled "in line with the principle of change and continuity which characterises the monarchical regime," he said. "We have been able to complete this mission successfully."



ABC NEWS, Morocco's king offers sympathy to victims of abuse

Staff and agencies, 06 January, 2006

By Lamine Ghanmi 49 minutes ago

RABAT - Morocco's King Mohammed, under pressure from human rights groups to apologize for more than four decades of past repression by the state, offered on Friday his sympathy for the victims.

The 42-year-old monarch's statement was his first since a truth commission he appointed found last month that 592 Moroccans were killed between the 1960s and 1990s in a period known in the North African country as the "years of lead."

The Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) also confirmed at least 9,779 cases of rights abuses ranging from deaths and injuries in detention and sexual abuses in years before the death in 1999 of the king's father, King Hassan.

"I announce the comforting news, with the hope that the merciful angels will carry it to the soul of my venerated father and the hearts of all the victims, the persons who had been wronged and their families, that we have sympathy and solicitude for them," King Mohammed said.

Morocco's main independent rights group, the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH), urged the king, who succeeded King Hassan, to apologize personally in the name of the state for past abuses.

It had criticized the findings of the IER, the Arab world's first truth commission, saying the number of dead was far higher and totaled several thousand.

State television broadcast the reform-minded king's address and showed military leaders, leading businessmen, government ministers and IER officials and some personalities who suffered abuses by the state in the past assembled to hear him.

Official sources said the footage was aimed at sending a message that the king wanted to put an end to divisions among Morocco's elite about past human rights abuses and focus efforts on combating poverty and mass unemployment.

Many Moroccans, including leading rights activists, say the country will only turn its back on the past and focus on the future once those responsible for past abuses are punished.

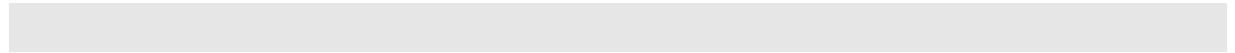
But many others fear the country could be plunged into turmoil if influential figures still active in the armed and security forces are prosecuted.

"In the name of the future generations I said: 'That is enough of selfishness. We must stop squandering precious opportunities and resources in struggles for fantasy,' the king said.

The IER report, which the king received last month, urged the authorities to deepen reforms, including moves to ensure the independence of the judiciary and an end to impunity for security officials.

The king reiterated his commitment to deepen reforms and pull the country onto a path of stability, progress and prosperity.

He tasked a government human rights watchdog Human Rights Consultative Council to ensure the IER's recommendations, including compensation for the victims, are implemented.



The Daily Star , Saturday, January 07, 2006

Rabat reconciles with its rights victims

king mohammad urges state to make amends for abuses under father's rule

By Agence France Presse (AFP)

RABAT: Morocco's King Mohammad VI called Friday for the state to make amends for human rights abuses committed under his father's rule by implementing the recommendations of a special reconciliation body. In a televised speech to the nation he said he wanted to give a tangible demonstration of his "strong support for consolidating truth, equity and reconciliation." At the same time, he added, this did not mean "we should forget the past, because history cannot be forgotten."

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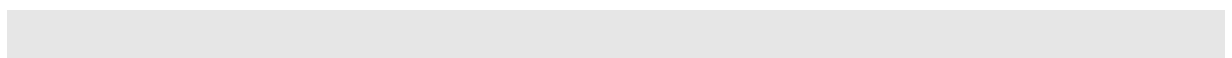
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WASHINGTON TIMES, 07/01/06

Reformist king regrets rights abuses under father

Moroccan King Mohammed VI in a nationally televised address yesterday expressed sympathy for thousands of victims of human rights abuses committed under the long reign of his father, King Hassan II. In a move Moroccans say is unprecedented in the Arab world, the reformist 42-year-old monarch embraced the findings of an "equity and reconciliation commission" he established to look into reports of state torture and abuse between 1956 and 1999, when Hassan died.

The panel, chaired by former political detainee Driss Benzekri, reported last month it had confirmed some 593 Moroccans killed by the government in those years and nearly 10,000 other cases of human rights violations, including disappearances, false imprisonment and sexual abuse.

In his first public address on the commission report, Mohammed said the findings, while painful, would help the North African country move ahead with social reconciliation and political reform.

"I send these glad tidings to [Hassan's] blessed soul to bring joy to his heart, as well as to the hearts of all victims, persons who have been wronged and their grieving families, about whom I care so deeply," Mohammed said.

The king said he was charging the government's human rights council with implementing a series of reforms endorsed by the equity and reconciliation panel. The recommendations include compensation for the victims and their families, judicial reforms and the end to legal immunity for security officials who commit human rights abuses.

The king's statement, broadcast before an audience that included several prominent dissidents who suffered under his father's reign, fell short of the direct apology sought by independent human rights groups in Morocco.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights has complained that the truth commission's estimates of the numbers killed and tortured are far too low.

But the equity and reconciliation commission, patterned on the panel that spotlighted crimes in apartheid South Africa, provided a rare opportunity in the Arab Middle East for a regime to come to terms publicly with its own failings.

The Moroccan panel, formed in November 2003, looked into some 16,000 cases and its investigative sessions were broadcast live to a large television audience.

"The responsibility of the state in human rights violations has been established and is evident and nothing can excuse it," Mr. Benzekri told reporters in Rabat last month at the release of the findings.

The king's father was a staunch ally of the United States and the West, but his long reign came to be known as Morocco's "years of lead," as an extensive

government security apparatus suppressed political and religious dissent.

Moroccan analysts said Mohammed still faces a delicate task. Prosecuting still-powerful figures in the government and army could also prove divisive.

Mohammed said in his remarks that he hoped the panel's findings will help Morocco move on.

"It is high time we turned to the present and the future of our sons, for they will not understand our failure to fulfill their reasonable aspiration for a life of dignity," he said.

David R. Sands

ABC NEWS, 09/01/2006

Morocco's king offers sympathy to victims of abuse

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