

Prisoners of faith

release
PRISONERS

EMAIL ALERT

SEPTEMBER 2010

Jamaa Ait Bakrim Morocco



Photo: International Christian Concern

Prisoner number 26574, Jamaa Ait Bakrim, a Moroccan Christian convert, has been imprisoned for his faith since 2005, and is currently detained in Prison Centrale, Kenitra, Morocco. On December 28, 2005 Jamaa was sentenced to 15 years for 'proselytism' and 'destruction of goods of others.' Moroccan Christians have commented that this second charge is a common legal tactic to lengthen the sentence and shift attention from the actual issue of religion. The charge of proselytism is derived from Article 220 of Moroccan Criminal Law which makes it illegal to 'shake the faith of a Muslim' and is used widely to restrict and suppress other faiths. This is the same official charge that has led to the expulsion of dozens of Christian missionaries from Morocco in the past six months.

Jamaa, who has a bachelor degree in political science, became a Christian in the 1990s while travelling in Europe. In 1993 he applied for political asylum in the Netherlands but was refused and expelled back to Morocco when his visa expired. Returning to his village, his family thought his conversion was something that would not last. However, this proved not to be the case. He continued to share his faith and in 1994 spent seven months in jail for 'proselytizing'. He was then incarcerated at a mental hospital although he had no mental instability. Two years later he was prosecuted for putting up a Christian cross in public and spent a further year in prison. On his release Jamaa was rejected by his family and forced to move from his home village to the city of Massa. During this time he resisted pressure to convert back to Islam. When he

burned two defunct wooden posts outside his shop that were restricting access and that had been unused for three years, it gave the authorities the excuse they needed. Although he contacted local authorities in an attempt to obtain permission, he received no response. He was then arrested, charged and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.

A professor who has known Jamaa since childhood stated: 'Fifteen years for two abandoned posts, it is scandalous. Jamaa presented a serious problem for the authorities. He displayed his convictions in broad daylight and it is for this reason he underwent a crackdown'. A businessman who knew Jamaa before he was arrested said, 'Jamaa is a Christian who is convinced of what he believes; he is far from being mad. The business of two burnt posts gave the authorities an excuse to rid their city of a man they hated'.

Jamaa openly confesses to being a Christian and has been very public about his faith. He does not, however, accept that he is guilty of the specific charges or that he deserves to be in prison. Whilst the fact of his Christian faith may have been an inconvenience for his Muslim neighbours, he believes it was in no way contrary to law.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

'I am in chains for Christ' Philippians 1:13

release
international
voice of persecuted christians

PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That God will protect Jamaa and that he will be released
- ▶ That God will soften the hearts of the Moroccan authorities
- ▶ That Moroccan believers will be strengthened and continue in their faith

PLEASE WRITE

When writing please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

You may also send a letter to the Moroccan Ambassador

HH Princess Lalla Jouvalla Alaoui
Embassy of The Kingdom of Morocco
49 Queen's Gate Garden
London, SW7 5NE

Dear Ambassador

Jamaa Ait Bakrim (prisoner number 26574) is currently serving a 15-year sentence in Prison Centrale, Kenitra, Morocco. He was convicted on December 28, 2005, by the Court of First Process in Agadir of 'proselytism' and the 'destruction of goods of others.' Before this ruling Jamaa had already spent multiple years in prison for 'proselytizing'. Jamaa was convicted under anti-proselytism Article 220. This law states that no one may 'employ means of seduction in the purpose of shaking the faith of a Muslim or to convert him to another religion.' Article 220 is poorly defined and used as a tool to crack down on religions outside Islam. However, even by the terms of Article 220, Jamaa used neither 'seduction' nor exploitation to convert Muslims, and should not be held for this reason.

The majority of Jamaa's sentence came ostensibly from Article 581, the 'destruction of the goods of others.' In reality he burned two defunct electric poles that had not been used in three years, an action for which he had sought permission from local officials. Clearly the sentence is not commensurate with the offence.

We ask you to correct this flagrant injustice and free Jamaa Ait Bakrim immediately, demonstrating to the world that Morocco is protecting religious freedom consistent with its international agreements.

Yours Sincerely

Release International produces the Prisoners of Faith alert every month as part of its ministry to support persecuted Christians. To receive your own copy free of charge by email, please register your details at www.releaseinternational.org/signup.

If you would like to make a financial donation to support Christian Prisoners of Faith and their families, you may give securely online at www.releaseinternational.org/donate, or by calling 01689 823491. Registered Charity 280577.

HELPING CHRISTIANS IMPRISONED FOR THEIR FAITH

Through our international network of missions, Release serves persecuted Christians in 30 countries around the world by supporting pastors and Christian prisoners, and their families; supplying Christian literature and Bibles; and working for justice. Please see www.releaseinternational.org for more information.

© Release International 2010 Tel: 01689 823491

release
international
voice of persecuted christians