



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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## “Press Freedom in Morocco”

B-369 Rayburn House Office Building, Friday, September 21, 2007, 12:00 PM

The *Committee to Protect Journalists* and Honorary Co-Hosts **Rep. Adam Schiff** (D-CA) and **Rep. Mike Pence** (R-IN), Co-Chairs, *Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press* hosted a presentation and discussion by journalist **Aboubakr Jamai**.

**Rep. Chris Van Hollen** (D-MD), who helped arrange the event but was not in attendance, issued an opening statement saying that Morocco’s political system is becoming more open, but he also expressed concern at the eroding freedom of the press there. “The Moroccan media has earned a reputation as one of the liveliest in the Arab world,” said the congressman. “However, there has been a disturbing trend over the past few years of the Moroccan government eroding the very same press freedoms that it has been touting.”

**Rep. Adam Schiff** and **Rep. Mike Pence**, also not in attendance, issued a joint written statement calling on the Moroccan government to reverse a recent trend eroding press freedom in the country. They said, “A free open press is essential to a healthy democracy. The censorship, intimidation, and imprisonment of journalists violate not only their personal liberty, but also the rights of those who are denied access to their ideas and information.”

**Aboubakr Jamai**, the former publisher of the independent weekly *Le Journal Hebdomadaire* spoke about the need for more press freedom in Morocco. He discussed the fact that while Morocco has a reputation as a liberalizing country, the lack of press freedom contradicts that image. He explained this discrepancy by saying that the Moroccan regime does not have the will to really democratize, which he defined as separation of powers and an independent judiciary.

He spoke about the methods the Moroccan regime uses to constrict press freedom, including jail time, fines, economic pressure through advertising boycotts and in the case of 1 journalist, banning from the industry. He argued that the media plays a significant role in political reform by smoothing the path and fostering debate. He cited as an example when *Le Journal* held a debate between Islamists and a government official about reforming women’s law which demonstrated that the gap between the two sides was not as wide as was thought and helped lead to reforms being passed.

During the Q&A session, Jamai was asked about the contradictions of being a US ally and democratizing. He did agree that these two conditions can lead to “schizophrenic” policies. For example, he said that as an ally of the US in the war on terror, some rights are trampled in detaining and torturing accused terrorists. However, he emphasized that more liberalized societies decrease terrorism by removing some of the conditions that lead to extremism. He concluded that after 9-11 the overall situation in Morocco has been more positive than negative.