



June 5, 1947

Letter, Secretary General of the Hizb al-islam al-watani to Arab Representatives in the US

Citation:

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Summary:

In 1907, French forces occupied a large part of present-day Morocco. It became a French protectorate in 1912, with a Franco-Spanish agreement turning the country's northern-most part into a Spanish protectorate. Morocco gained independence in 1956, the same year as Tunisia, which from 1881 had been a French protectorate as well. The two North African countries obtained independence more easily than their common neighbor, Algeria. But they, too, had to fight hard. After World War II Moroccan nationalists did so seeking the support not only of fellow colonial elites and of already decolonized states like Egypt, which indeed adapted a rather ambiguous stance towards them. Rather, as David Stenner's *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State* (2019) has shown, they also nurtured contacts in Europe and in the United States. The latter's postwar might made it of critical importance for the Moroccans, who sought to gain US governmental and public opinion support vis-à-vis France. These postwar moves built on networks rooted in the interwar period and in World War II. (In fact, Vichy-controlled Morocco was one of the first polities aligned with Nazi Germany that US and British forces conquered in the war, in November 1942.)

Another important arena for post-World War II Moroccan nationalists was the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York. There, they received organizational and political help from recently independent states like Indonesia and some Arab states. In turn, in the later 1950s Morocco would help Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale at the UN.

The text reprinted here reflects the Moroccan interest in the UN. It is the English translation of an Arabic letter written by the leadership of a Moroccan nationalist movement, the Party of National Reform. It introduced its emissary to the UN and to the United States, Mehdi Bennouna (1918-2010). A son of the "father of Moroccan nationalism," Hajj Abdelsalam, he was one of the few Anglophone Moroccan nationalists. In 1929 he had been sent to attend high school in a nationalist Arab school in British Mandate Palestine, and in the later 1930s studied inter alia at the American University of Cairo.

Original Language:

Arabic

Contents:

Translation - English

God is Great

From the Central Committee of the Party of National Reform to their Excellencies, the representatives of the Arab states, and to our brothers, the Arab personalities active in various committees and bodies in [the United States of] America, and to every friend who cares to spread information about our cause and in extending a helping hand to our nation: greetings, may have good mercy on you and bless you.

The bearer of this letter is the capable patriot and fighter *ustadh*^[i] Mr. Mehdi Bin Abdalsalam Banuna, a trustworthy party agent and a dependable, sanctioned personality of the national movement in Morocco in view of his capacities, services, and sacrifices in the anti-colonial struggle. Our national body has commissioned him to set up a mission supporting our Moroccan cause in the United States, the country of in the United States justice, freedom, and democracy. He is to inform public opinion about Morocco's situation and about the horror of Spanish and French colonialism that we endure, and to contact diplomatic personalities and political bodies seeking the help of people who have an alive conscience and believe in the principles of free humankind, in order to defend our nation's rights and our state's honor. We ask everybody who cares to share information about this letter's introduction to be of good assistance to *ustadh* Banuna in his sincere national mission and to consider him our representative and the delegate of our body, which represents the nation's opinion and enjoys our dear people's complete trust. We sincerely thank and are deeply grateful to everybody who strengthens and supports us and reinforces our side in the fight against the colonizer and the struggle against the tyranny dominating our country. God helps him who helps his brother.

Tetuan (Morocco), June 5, 1947 = 15 Rajab 1366

The General Secretary of the Party of National Reform

^[i] *Ustadh* is inter alia a form of address to intellectuals; it may here be translated as master or professor.