

# **Foreword**

**Amina Bouayach**

**Chairperson of the National Human Rights Council**

The year 2023 was marked by pivotal, highly significant milestones and events which further consolidated the foundations of a state committed to upholding its citizens' rights and freedoms, fostered solidarity and social harmony among Morocco's diverse communities, while also prompting important discussions on the effective implementation of international human rights instruments.

The first of these milestones and moments was His Majesty the King's initiative to declare the Amazigh New Year a paid national holiday. This decision not only represents a significant step towards fully enshrining the provisions of the Constitution but also a major turning point in reinforcing a renewed sense of the plural nature of national identity, enriched by its various tributaries. This decision also affirmed the shared cultural and civilizational heritage among all Moroccans, highlighting their unity as a proactive, visionary nation that has developed its own foundations, methods and mechanisms to face the various challenges of contemporary times.

The second significant moment of 2023 was marked by both profound collective sorrow and hope, following the devastating earthquake whose effects extended to four regions. It was a time of mourning, not only because of the human losses and material damage, but also because it highlighted the extent of the vulnerability in these affected regions, the fragility of their infrastructures, and the substantial deficit in access to fundamental rights for the local population. Our heartfelt condolences continue to go out to the families of the victims and their relatives, as well as to Moroccan society as a whole.

On the other hand, the earthquake was also a moment of remarkable unity and solidarity, one of the most striking manifestations of which was the social mobilization and

compassion shown by all Moroccans, regardless of social class or geographical affiliation, both inside and outside the country. This unequivocal solidarity played a decisive role in the relief and recovery operations, alongside various initiatives aimed at leveraging the crisis to accelerate development projects in the affected regions, specifically addressing disparities that have long hindered progress in Morocco's villages and mountainous areas. To facilitate this process, a special, open fund was established on September 9 to manage the aftermath of the earthquake, with contributions reaching approximately 20 billion dirhams by the end of December 2023.

In this same context, amidst the rapid intervention and national response to the earthquake's effects, another prominent milestone unfolded with a strong focus on children, one of the most vulnerable groups exposed to various risks during crises and natural disasters. The protection of children, particularly the orphaned, became central to the disaster management strategy, following His Majesty the King's directive to ensure their immediate care, ascertain their numbers and grant them the "Wards of the Nation" status. This momentous decision stands as one of the major milestones that marked the year 2023, shielding children from all risks, and ensuring that children designated as wards of the nation have access to essential services and comprehensive protection that goes beyond economic support, in line with the standards set by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its general comment No. 13.

As ensuring protection for children in the digital space has become imperative, in October 2023, CNDH's General Assembly approved the conclusions and recommendations emanating from our monitoring of the protection of children's rights on digital platforms, alongside field visits to earthquake-affected areas, where we emphasized the need to ensure a safe digital environment for children that supports their protection, encourages their participation and prioritizes their best interest.

As much as these events demonstrate the resilience of Morocco's society and institutions, they should also encourage us to remain vigilant and work towards strengthening the Moroccan model for protecting rights, enhancing its capacity to withstand major

challenges facing human rights worldwide which have intensified in 2023 with the outbreak of the war on Gaza, causing daily civilian deaths, especially among children and women, widespread starvation and massive infrastructure destruction.

Added to these three national milestones is a fourth event with regional and international dimensions: the international symposium on the universality of human rights held in Rabat in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Amidst the ongoing global tensions and human rights violations which go against the founding principles and values of the UDHR, this gathering was an opportunity to renew our universal commitment to protecting rights and freedoms and ensuring effective access to the rights of individuals and groups, especially in the face of the challenges that continue to impede the international community's efforts to address human rights issues.

Participants in the symposium noted that the universality of the UDHR's principles has become more at stake in recent years than ever before, highlighting the international human rights system's incapacity to put an end to the human rights violations during wars; especially the war on Gaza, as one of the greatest challenges to fully implementing human rights principles and consolidating their universality.

In light of the escalating global tensions and the insufficient actions taken to address them, which pose an unprecedented threat to the foundational values and norms of the human rights system, we are all called upon to intensify our efforts to strengthen our national systems for protecting rights and freedoms, while developing strategies for international advocacy to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the universality of rights and their effective implementation, and safeguarding human dignity for all.

The National Human Rights Council hereby presents the findings and recommendations of its monitoring and evaluation of the human rights situation in Morocco for the year 2023, in accordance with Articles 64 and 35 of Law No. 76-15 on its reorganization, following unanimous approval by its General Assembly in the session of February 2024.