



Web Exclusives: PawPlus

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## **Reforming Morocco**

### **Expatriate Prince Moulay Hicham '85 calls for change at campus conference on the Islamic world**

Second in line to the throne of Morocco's Alawite kingdom, Prince Moulay Hicham Ben Abdallah '85 has spoken out forcefully about the need to reform his country's political institutions, including the monarchy itself, calling for "a new form of politics, a politics of truth - open, frank, transparent - that encourages participation throughout the population." On September 27 he spoke about Islam, democracy, and governance at a conference on campus that brought together scholars and journalists from across the Islamic world. To view the entire conference, go to <http://www.princeton.edu/WebMedia/special/>. Last winter Moulay Hicham temporarily left the world of Moroccan politics and moved back to Princeton with his wife and two young daughters. PAW's Kathryn Federici Greenwood interviewed him at his Princeton home, which he has owned since his junior year.

#### **Can you tell me what you will address at the conference?**

My approach is to talk about the discursive tradition in Islam. Islam is for Muslims a divine message, which is indivisible and came as a whole. But beyond that Islam is also how Muslims have lived their religion in given times and places. So Islam is also a question of historicity. Every Muslim and every area of the Muslim world has a different relationship to the scriptures, to the Prophet, and to the holy places in Islam. So it's not a monolithic corpus. Islam is a historical, discursive tradition. So my approach is to treat Islam from this angle and also with regards to the particular questions: How do Muslims view democracy? How do Muslims view politics?

I will also look at the possibilities for democratization in the region. I do it from the perspective of a Muslim who's been involved in politics for the past 10 years. I've been both involved from within the monarchy and I have also been involved from within civil society. My talk is not entirely academic, but it's certainly thoughtful and intellectual, from the perspective of a militant practitioner.

#### **Can you summarize the reforms you've called for in Morocco's government and institutions?**

My positions are on the record. They have been known for the past 10 years. My principal approach is to look at reform not in terms of the monarchy giving up power, etc., but in terms of the monarchy rationalizing its position, rationalizing its role in society in view of the new changes, which are both internal and external. I would like to see the monarchy construct a new national pact in which its role would be more one of symbolic importance, of arbitration, and of ensuring the equilibrium of the country. This new role would make it withdraw from the daily running of affairs, which would be left to a government coming out of a parliament based on universal suffrage. So, separation of powers, clarification of who does what - It's a very complex transformation. It's not an easy one. And it's got a lot of dangers and a lot of risks associated with it.

But there are also a lot of risks associated with not making these changes. And we've seen the history of Europe and the history of other monarchies. So my preferred term is one of rationalization. Rationalize the role of critical actors.

#### **What are the dangers and risks for not making changes to reform the monarchy and its role?**

First of all, as I said, the failure to reform will have its own costs. There are economic costs. You can't address problems of underdevelopment; you can't address socioeconomic problems unless everyone trusts the political system. These are costs. But there are also risks for the institution. If this institutional lethargy persists, it might expose the monarchy to dangers. These dangers are social upheaval and unrest. We've seen it in other countries. Why have you decided to take a break from Moroccan politics?

Because there was too much focus on me, as a prince within the monarchy, and not enough focus on the ideas, which in fact are shared by people in the elite and in society in general. So too much focus on me and too much "Well, what does he want? Why is he doing this?" And it became rather unhealthy for me, my family, and also for the country. It's unusual in the Arab world that things are formulated with such frankness by someone in the royal family. So I've decided to take a distance from all this. Also I do not want the identity of the messenger to pollute the message, which was also being expressed by other sectors of society.

I still follow what happens in my country. I still express myself about general political questions. But I've decided my interventions will be more reflective and detached, not of those of an actor on the front line on a daily basis.

**Do you still go back to Morocco?**

Sure. I just came back from a month and half of vacation. I will continue to go every time I have the opportunity.

**Why have you spoken out about the political situation?**

I wanted and still want to make a meaningful contribution to the country. And my public discourse was in congruence with a lot of events that were happening on the ground. Morocco in the mid 1990s, under my uncle's reign, did begin the transformation to a more representative, transparent government. So it wasn't as if my comments were made out of the blue. There was a context. There was a general atmosphere of political debate.

**Is it unusual that a prince would criticize the monarchy?**

It's very unusual that a call for reform comes from a family member. And it creates all sorts of reactions. Some people raise their eyebrows. Some people are scared. Others applaud. But it's important to put it in context. The context of Morocco in the 1990s was unique compared to other monarchies in the Arab world.

**What has the reaction within your family been to your ideas on the need for reform in Morocco?**

It became pretty clear early on that - and it's something that I accepted - that if one wanted to be as active, one would have to engage only himself and not the rest of the family. So that kind of autonomy meant also sacrificing on my part. And that meant not being involved with official functions of the family. Keeping a one-to-one relationship with everybody in the family, but not being invited to public functions. It was never formulated as a trade-off but it was implicit that, "Look, you are autonomous but your ideas are yours alone. You're not speaking for the rest of us."

**You mentioned that some people were scared by what you've said. Are you referring to the general public?**

Some of my friends felt it was threatening for them.

**Because they were afraid for themselves?**

They felt uncomfortable. But I also made other friends. Some people in government were nervous. But a lot of people appreciated a new voice calling for change that had weight because of its symbolic value to them.

**As a member of the royal family, why do you assume these risks to speak out?**

First of all, the monarchy is an old institution, and with deep cultural and political legitimacy. It can only gain by embracing the idea that what's good for the country is also good for the institution of the monarchy. Moroccans understand that this debate has been going on for 40 years, and it comes and goes in waves. So I really felt it was the right thing to do.

**What do the September 27 elections mean for Morocco?**

They represent a crossroads. On the one hand, there is a genuine effort to make them clear and transparent. On the other hand, they are happening in the context of a political system whose components are in crisis. The political parties are in crisis. The rules of the game, the general political context within which elections occur, needs reform. Will the elections help to spur reform, or will the lack of reform make these elections worthless? We'll just have to see how it plays out. Why did you move back to Princeton?

I've had this house since my junior year in college. So it's been here for 20 years. My mother, sister, and brother would visit often. It's a second home. I am very comfortable here.

**Before you moved back last winter, did you visit Princeton?**

Absolutely. I usually came at least once a year.

**Why did you decide to go to college at Princeton?**

I went to the American School in Rabat, which was more of an international school. The logical outlet for the school was England or the United States. I applied to a few universities and got into Princeton and decided to come.

**Is it unusual that you didn't go to the palace school like other princes in Morocco?**

Yes, very unusual. It's a unique case. Princes usually go to the palace school.

**So what pushed you to go to Princeton?**

There was no "push." It was a decision made by my parents with some input from me.

**Why did your parents want you to go here?**

It's an excellent university! Who would not want their son to go to Princeton?

**How did attending Princeton affect your thinking?**

A lot. It was fundamental. Not only because I received a Western education - many Moroccans have Western education. But it was especially important that I was going far away from home. Paris, where lots of Moroccans go for college, is a place where there are a lot of influences from home. You always bump into somebody you know. Here it is staying a year at a time in a context that is completely removed from home. It is a very different setting with very different influences, which allows you to develop in an independent way. So that contributed a lot.

**What do you think universities in this country can do to grow more understanding between the Arab world and the U.S.?**

It's multifaceted. Encounters such as the conference on September 27 are very important for the process of understanding. These encounters can happen in other countries in the world. Universities can also foster programs that promote a better understanding of Islam and the region. And sponsor intellectual production - books, studies - that can then circulate in the region and in think tanks in the United States. Universities are sources of enlightenment. And I think they play an important role.

**Do you think there's enough going on at universities to spread more understanding?**

No, I think that the efforts that are deployed in front of the challenge are not yet enough. After September 11, the need for these efforts grew exponentially.

**Are you second or third in line to the king?**

I keep forgetting.

**If you were king, what would be your goals?**

That's a question from science fiction. Morocco has its king.

**What are your official responsibilities as prince?**

There are no specific duties.

**Since 1985, what have you done?**

I've done a lot of things for international organizations. I've done a lot of work with the Carter Center, election observation, conflict resolution; I worked for the UN in Kosovo for eight months. I did a lot of writing. And of course I founded the Institute for Transregional Studies at Princeton University.

I wanted to open new horizons. My work outside the country came into conflict a little bit with the traditional passive role of a prince.

**Do you think Morocco is one model for other Arab nations for developing more open and democratic government?**

Morocco has the potential to become a model. That's what's frustrating. For a time Morocco was the good student in the class, so to speak, but now it's losing its edge. Other countries are catching up. Other countries are showing the same potential, such as Lebanon, Bahrain.

**What time are you referring to?**

My period begins in 1996. It's a historical window of opportunity.

**Do you have anything to add about the future of democratization in the Arab world and Morocco?**

The present conjuncture is difficult, but one never knows. How does Islam figure into that future?

Religion is not the culprit here. There are many factors. First of all, it is never religion, per se. It may be the politicization of the religion that is a parameter. But it's only one parameter among many. There's nothing intrinsic to Islam that makes it the problem. The problem is the direction Islamic thought has taken. Historical and economic factors also complicate the equation. And now the geopolitical context is much more complicated in the post September 11 climate.

**Why is the geopolitical context more complicated post September 11?**

It's removing from the international political agenda these issues of democratization and development. Everything is based on security. The post September 11 trauma is disfiguring international politics. The war on terrorism is empowering security apparatuses in different countries.

**And with all this talk of war on Iraq, things will only get worse. Do you agree?**

Yes, it's going to make things worse.

**You've also spoken of the "clash of civilizations" between Islam and the West. How can that be softened?**

I don't believe it exists. I think it's been created by reductionism on both sides. And then it becomes a reality. You get into a vicious circle and then you cannot come out.

**The news you get in Morocco and the region is much different than the news we hear in the U.S., isn't it?**

Absolutely.

**And do people in that part of the world learn about events we don't hear about?**

Absolutely. I think the American media coverage of our region of the world is very biased and superficial.

**It also probably feeds misunderstanding.**

Yes. And on our side, too, there are a lot of simplistic attitudes- "America wants to conquer the world," you know.

**Is there anything you want to add?**

I'm very happy to be back and spending time here. I'm doing some research and thinking of publishing some new papers in the international press. Princeton is a very relaxing place.