

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST DETAINED OVER BOGUS CHARGES

On 31 August 2019, Moroccan police arrested journalist Hajar Raissouni on suspicion of carrying out an abortion, despite lack of evidence supporting the claims. She was arrested as she left a doctor's clinic in Rabat, along with her fiancé the doctor and two medical staff. Hajar and the four others remain detained until today. Their trial is on September 16.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Head of Government Saad Eddine Al-Othmani
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The Honourable head of government of Morocco,

*On 31 August 2019, as journalist **Hajar Raissouni** and her fiancé walked out of a doctor's clinic in the capital Rabat, six police officers in plain clothes (one holding a camera) asked Hajar if she had undergone an abortion. They then arrested Hajar Raissouni, her fiancé, the doctor and two medical staff members working in the clinic. According to Hajar's lawyer Saad Sahli there is no evidence for abortion in the medical report. All five individuals face unfounded abortion related charges. Hajar is charged with having an abortion while her fiancé is charged with corruption and taking part in performing an abortion. Her doctor faces the charge of performing abortions regularly and his staff with taking part in performing an abortion. All five risk up to one year in prison. Hajar and the four other individuals remain in prison waiting for their trial on September 16, the week Hajar and her fiancé had planned to have their wedding.*

On September 4, Hajar sent a letter from prison to her newspaper Akhbar al-Yaoum. She mentioned that while in custody, she was interrogated about her political writings, and was asked about one of her colleagues at Akhbar al-Yaoum and about her family, including her uncle Ahmed Raissouni, a prominent theologian and the ex-president of the Mouvement de l'Unité et de la Réforme (MUR), one of the largest Islamic movements in Morocco. This information raises concerns that Hajar Raissouni's arrest was politically motivated and related to her journalistic work. In May 2019, Hajar Raissouni had published a series of interviews with Ahmed Zefzafi, father of Nasser Zefzafi, the Hirak El-Rif protest movement leader. She has also published articles critical of Moroccan authorities.

I therefore ask you to immediately and unconditionally release Hajar Raissouni, her fiancé and all three other detainees in the case, as this detention is a flagrant breach of her privacy and her other human rights. I call on you to also ensure that - pending her release – her detention must be in line with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. Finally, I call on you to reform laws that violate women's rights, including the right to bodily and personal autonomy, non-discrimination, privacy and health.

Yours sincerely,

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Under Moroccan law, sex outside of marriage is a criminal offence. Abortion is also criminalized in all circumstances unless the health of the pregnant woman is at risk and her spouse agrees. However, under international law, women have a right to bodily and personal autonomy which includes being free to make their own sexual and reproductive decisions. Criminalization of health services needed only by women, such as an abortion, amounts to gender discrimination. This case is a stark reminder of the urgent need to repeal Morocco's laws criminalizing sex outside marriage and abortion. These provisions violate women's rights, including the rights to bodily and personal autonomy, non-discrimination, privacy, and health.

In Morocco, journalists and human rights defenders are subject to prison terms for expressing their views peacefully. Prosecutors used disproportionate and inappropriate security-related charges based on offences in the Penal Code and counter-terrorism legislation. Taoufik Bouachrine, the editor of the newspaper Akhbar al-Yaoum where Hajar Raissouni works, was sentenced to 12 years in prison on politically motivated charges in November 2018.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 25 October 2019.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Hajar Raissouni (her/she)