

# URGENT ACTION

## SYRIAN WRITER DETAINED

**Raghdah Sa'id Hassan, a 38-year-old female Syrian writer, has been held incommunicado since she was arrested on 10 February. She may be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression. She is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.**

Raghdah Hassan was arrested on the Syrian side of the Al 'Arida border crossing with Lebanon, while she was travelling by car to Lebanon. According to sources from Syria, Raghdah Hassan is now being kept at the Political Security branch in Tartus, a city on Syria's Mediterranean coast.

On 13 February, Raghdah Hassan's flat was ransacked when nobody was there, apparently by the security forces. There were no signs of a break-in. A paper print-out of Raghdah Hassan's unpublished first and only novel, *The New Prophets*, was confiscated, as were several publications by various Syrian opposition political parties.

The Syrian authorities have not revealed the reasons behind Raghdah Hassan's arrest or any charges brought against her. Amnesty International believes that her arrest may be related to her intention to publish her novel, which describes political conditions in Syria in the 1990s, as well as to suspicions that she is active in an opposition party.

Raghdah Hassan was questioned by Political Security on several occasions during the last three months of 2009. She was summoned to their branch in Tartus twice and they visited her twice, once in her flat and once in her clothes shop. They demanded she sign a statement that she would not publish the novel, but she refused to do so.

Raghdah Hassan suffers from recurrent attacks of a renal colic resulting from kidney stones. The condition causes her great pain, which requires regular intake of daily and specific antibiotics together with strong painkillers.

### **PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English, French or your own language:**

- Expressing concern that Raghdah Sa'id Hassan appears to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on the authorities to release her immediately and unconditionally if this is the case;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that she will not be tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and reminding them that Syria is a state party to the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Urging the authorities to immediately allow her visits from her family, a lawyer of her choosing, an appropriate diet and any medical treatment she may require.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 MARCH 2009 TO:**

#### President

Bashar al-Assad  
 Presidential Palace  
 al-Rashid Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 332 3410**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### Minister of Interior

Major Sa'id Mohamed Samour  
 Ministry of Interior  
 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 222 3428**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

#### **And copies to:**

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
 His Excellency Walid al-Mua'llim  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
 Abu Rummaneh  
 al-Rashid Street  
 Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic  
**Fax: +963 11 332 7620**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
 INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Freedoms of expression and association are strictly controlled in Syria, aided by “state of emergency” laws which have been in force since 1964. Only the Ba’ath Party and some parties linked to it are officially recognized as political parties in Syria and human rights organizations are not authorized to operate. Political activists, human rights defenders, bloggers and government critics face constant harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention. For example, in March 2009, Habib Saleh, a pro-reform activist, was sentenced to three years in prison by the Damascus Criminal Court for “weakening nationalist sentiment” and spreading “false news”. The charges related to several articles criticizing the government that he had written and published on the internet prior to his arrest on 7 May 2008.

Raghdah Hassan worked as a teacher in a public kindergarten in Tartus until 2008, when she went on open-ended unpaid sabbatical leave. She subsequently rented and ran a second-hand clothes shop until the end of 2009.

Raghdah Hassan was previously detained without trial or charge for two and a half years, between 1992 and 1995, for her alleged membership of the Communist Action Party (CAP). In 1995, she was brought before the Supreme State Security Court (SSSC) and acquitted. This period of her detention inspired her unpublished novel, *The New Prophets*, which describes political conditions in Syria during the 1990s through a love story involving two Syrian prisoners.

The CAP is an unauthorized opposition party which was founded in August 1976 and engages in non-violent political activities in Syria. Since its foundation, the party has faced periodic repression and hundreds of its members have been arrested. In the 1990s, hundreds of CAP members were tried before the SSSC and the majority were sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

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