

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 30/21/99

11 June 1999

Further information on UA 149/97 (MDE 30/29/97, 27 May 1997) and follow-ups (MDE 30/34/97, 4 June, MDE 30/45/97, 26 August, MDE 30/47/97, 29 August and MDE 30/48/97, 10 September) - Fear of torture/ill-treatment/Prisoner of conscience

TUNISIA Rachida BEN SALEM (f)

Amnesty International welcomes the recent release of prisoner of conscience Rachida Ben Salem. She had begun a two year and three month prison sentence, later extended to two years and six months, in September 1997.

She was arrested in May 1997 with her two daughters, then aged five and seven, near the Libyan border. She had been planning to cross into Libya and travel from there to Holland to join her husband, a political refugee. She was imprisoned on a charge of membership of an unauthorised association (the Islamist group *al-Nahda*, of which her husband is a supporter) and a further charge related to the law on border crossings. The first charge she denied, and seemed to be based solely on the fact that she was married to a supporter of the group, to which she was not known to have any links. Since she was arrested well within Tunisia, the second charge was based only on her intention to leave the country.

Two other women prisoners of conscience were released at the same time: Souad Charbati, who had been imprisoned since August 1995 and was serving a seven-year sentence, and Radhia Aouididi, who began a three year sentence in November 1996 (see UA 270/96, MDE 30/39/96, 21 November 1996).

These two women had also been arrested as they were trying to leave Tunisia, Souad Charbati to join her husband, Radhia Aouididi to join her fiancé, who are refugees abroad. Both had previously been detained, harassed and intimidated.

It is not clear at this stage if these women will finally be allowed to leave Tunisia to join their partners abroad.

No further action is required by the Urgent Action network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals.