

EXTERNAL

AI Index: MDE 30/55/97

25 November 1997

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)**

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On 20 November 1997, Rachida Ben Salem's prison sentence was increased from two years and three months to two years and six months on appeal.

Rachida Ben Salem's original prison sentence consisted of two years on a charge of membership of an unauthorized association (the Islamist group *al-Nahda*, of which her husband is a supporter), a charge which she denies, and three months on a charge related to the law regulating border crossing. Given that at the time of her arrest Rachida Ben Salem was in Tunisia, quite some distance from the Libyan border, she was convicted on the basis of her intention to leave the country.

Regarding the first charge of membership of an unauthorized association, this seems to be based solely on Rachida Ben Salem's marital relationship with an *al-Nahda* supporter. She herself is not known to have any links with the group. Moreover, if she were a member or a supporter of *al-Nahda*, Amnesty International would still consider her a prisoner of conscience because she has not used or advocated violence.

Regarding the charge of intending to cross the border illegally, Rachida Ben Salem was intending to leave Tunisia with her children to join her husband, a political refugee in the Netherlands, who she and her children have not seen for several years. She has been subjected to harassment and ill-treatment for several years: she does not have a passport and she has not been able to leave her country, a right guaranteed by Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Rachida Ben Salem was arrested on 18 May 1997 with her two daughters, aged five and seven, near the Libyan border. She was held in incommunicado detention in the Ministry of the Interior in Tunis until 31 May before being transferred to prison. She was reportedly insulted and had her hair pulled during her secret detention in a police station immediately following her arrest.

**Many thanks to all who have sent appeals on behalf of Rachida Ben Salem. This UA will now transfer for action by other parts of AI. However UA participants who wish to send another letter or fax may do so, in French, Arabic, English or in your own language:**

- expressing dismay at the increase in prison sentence against Rachida Ben Salem;
- calling for her immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience.

**APPEALS TO:**

1) Minister of Justice  
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Ministre de la Justice  
Ministère de la Justice

2

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**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

2) Minister of the Interior

M. Mohamed Ben Rejeb

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**Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Your Excellency**

**COPIES TO:**

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and to diplomatic representatives of Tunisia accredited to your country.