

URGENT ACTION

ONE YEAR IN PRISON FOR UNLAWFUL ABORTION

On 30 September 2019, Moroccan journalist Hajar Raissouni and her fiancé Amin Rifaat were sentenced to one year in prison after being convicted of abortion related offences and sex outside of marriage. The doctor involved in the alleged abortion was convicted and sentenced to two years in prison, and two other members of medical staff received suspended sentences of one year and eight months respectively.

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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Your Excellency,

On 30 September 2019, the Court of First Instance in Rabat sentenced journalist **Hajar Raissouni**, to one year in prison for having an abortion and sex outside of marriage. Her fiancé, Amin Rifaat, was also sentenced to one year in prison for assisting with an abortion and sex outside marriage. The medical professionals involved in the case were also convicted and sentenced to prison for having practiced or assisted with an abortion. Dr Mohammed Jamal Belkeziz was sentenced to two years in prison and banned from practising for two years, while the two other members of medical staff were given suspended sentences of one year and eight months, respectively. All these charges have been denied by Hajar and Amin, and Muhammad Sadkou, member of Hajar and Amin's defence team, has publicly announced plans to appeal the case

On 31 August 2019, journalist Hajar Raissouni and her fiancé were arrested as they walked out of a doctor's clinic in the capital Rabat. On September 4, Hajar sent a letter from prison through 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.

Under international human rights 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.

I therefore ask you to quash the sentences and immediately release Hajar Raissouni, her fiancé, the doctor and the two other medical staff, as this detention is a flagrant breach of their human rights. I call on you to also ensure that – pending their release – the conditions of detention of Hajar Raissouni, her fiancé and the medical staff 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 provisions of law which criminalise sex outside of marriage and abortion, and investigate any concerns that security forces may have targeted Hajar Raissouni to punish her for her work or silence her.

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. The editor of the newspaper she works for Akhbar al-Yaoum, Taoufik Bouachrine, was sentenced to 12 years in prison on politically motivated charges in November 2018

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic, French or English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 14 November 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)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde29/1038/2019/en/>