

Morocco: Release Hajar Raissouni Now!

Tuesday 8 October 2019, by [WHRDMENA](#) (Date first published: 1 October 2019).

Hajar Raissouni, a Moroccan journalist has been sentenced to a year in prison for premarital sex and having an abortion, in a case that is part of a crackdown on critical reporters.

Police in Rabat arrested Hajar Raissouni, August 31, 2019, in front of a gynaecologist's clinic in Agdal, according to a statement released by The Moroccan Association for Human Rights [1]. Police also filmed Hajar Raissouni [2], violating her right to privacy, and then arrested her fiancée.

Hajar Raissouni was then brought before the attorney at the Rabat Court in which the prosecutor charged her of "illegal sexual relations, which resulted in pregnancy and illegal abortion", despite a medical report denying any abortion. On September 4, in a letter sent to her newspaper [3], Hajar said that while in detention, she was interrogated about her political writings, confirming that she had been targeted by the authorities for her journalistic work. On 5 September, the prosecutor publicized the results of Hajar's medical examinations, in a horrific violation of her privacy, and stated that the clinic she visited was under surveillance on suspicion of providing abortion services. Raissouni's lawyer Saad al-Sahili said earlier that the medical tests did not reveal tangible evidence of abortion.

On 23 September, during Hajar's fourth session, the Court rejected all her defenses. The judge stated that an act of abortion has been proven, and then linked her fiancée, the doctor and his staff to what he described as "crime". The judge added that the judicial police had obtained information and a notice that the gynaecologist's was in the process of carrying out an abortion outside the law, and have carried out such operations before and that the judicial police acted on a previous notice, denying the targeting of Hajar Raissouni.

In her speech to the court, Hajar Raissouni said that the Public Prosecutor's Office should've sent a notice to her, instead of going against her. Raissouni also accused the prosecution of defamation. After a nine-hour hearing at court, the court decided to postpone it until Monday, 30 September.

On September 30, 2019, a Moroccan court in Rabat sentenced WHRD Hajar Raissouni to one year in prison for "illegal abortion" and "corruption", along with her fiancée. The anesthesiologist was sentenced to a one-year suspended prison sentence.

The journalist Hajar Raissouni is known for her human rights activism, especially in covering Hirak al Rif. In May 2019, Raissouni published a series of interviews with a number of activists in Hirak al Rif. She also published articles that raise questions about certain human rights abuses.

The charges against woman human rights defender and journalist Hajar Al-Rissouni are nothing but an attempt to incite patriarchal, societal and communal violence against her. Patriarchal culture delegitimizes WHRDs and their work by charging them with sexist charges of a with the aim of punishing them, as well as to emphasize the control over women's bodies, and defame their reputation according to the standards imposed by patriarchal culture. Hajar Raissouni was subjected to a forced medical examination, which is a form of torture and runs counter to all of Morocco's

human rights obligations.

The Regional Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa stands in solidarity with WHRD Hajar Raissouni and condemns her imprisonment and demands that the Moroccan authorities immediately and unconditionally. The unjust charges against journalist Hajar Raissouni, despite their lack of credibility, violate a number of women's rights, including the rights to autonomy, non-discrimination, privacy and health. They also put women WHRDs at risk of societal violence. The Moroccan authorities should therefore pledge to respect human rights, including women's rights, and to provide the necessary environment for women human rights defenders, including journalist Hajar Raissouni, to pursue their vital work in Moroccan society.

Regional Coalition of Women Human Rights Defenders in the Middle East and North Africa (WHRDMENA)

P.S.

- <https://whrdmena.org/2019/10/01/morocco-release-hajar-raissouni-now/?lang=en>
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Footnotes

[1] <https://www.goud.ma/482177-الامر-الصادر-باعتقال-الصحفية-الجزائرية-التي-تدافع-عن-حقوق-المرأة/>

[2] <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/news/2019/09/morocco-release-journalist-detained-for-unlawful-abortion/>

[3] <https://www.alyaoum24.com/1295019.html>