

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of imminent flogging/Legal concern

3 April 1992

SAUDI ARABIA:

Maha Sa'ad-ul-Din Banat
Ahmed Hussein al-Zahrani

On 10 March 1992, Maha Sa'ad-ul-Din Banat, a 35-year-old Syrian national and mother of four was sentenced to 200 lashes by the Shari'a Court of Expedient Affairs in Riyadh. Maha Banat was accused of adultery with Ahmed Hussein al-Zahrani, a Saudi citizen, a man she claims she does not know. Ahmed al-Zahrani was sentenced by the same court to three months in prison and 100 lashes. The administration of the lashings was postponed for the duration of the holy month of Ramadan, which, in Saudi Arabia, ended on 2 April.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Maha Banat, her 15-year-old daughter, Ansaf Banat, and Ahmed al-Zahrani were arrested by members of the "Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice" (CPVPV), commonly known as the *mutawa'een* or religious police. The arrests took place outside the Central Telecommunications office in Riyadh on 12 February after an argument ensued between Ahmed al-Zahrani and Maha Banat, who accused him of propositioning her daughter. The quarrel caught the attention of a member of the CPVPV. Apparently in an attempt to deny the accusation, Ahmed al-Zahrani reportedly claimed that he had given Maha Banat 500 Riyals for sexual favours. The three were taken to the CPVPV headquarters in al-Muraba' in Riyadh. During questioning, Ahmed al-Zahrani was allegedly beaten and made to sign a confession stating he had had a sexual relationship with Maha Banat. Ansaf Banat was also reportedly threatened and made to sign a confession to the effect that her mother knew Ahmed al-Zahrani.

Ansaf was released after five hours while her mother remained in prison for four days, reportedly without food. She was released on 16 February; however, she has been forbidden from leaving her house except when accompanied by her husband. After three sessions, on 7, 8 and 10 March, the Shari'a Court of Expedient Affairs in Riyadh charged Maha Banat and Ahmed al-Zahrani with adultery and passed the sentences. There were no defence lawyers or witnesses present and there was no possibility of appealing the court's decision.

Amnesty International considers flogging to be cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment prohibited internationally by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention against Torture or Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters:

- reiterating Amnesty International's opposition to the judicial punishment of flogging, and urging that the sentences not be carried out;
- urging that a prompt and impartial inquiry be carried out into allegations that Maha Banat and Ahmad Zahrani were ill-treated while in custody, and that its findings be made public;
- expressing concern that Maha Banat and Ahmad Zahrani did not receive a fair trial in accordance with international standards.

APPEALS TO

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| His Royal Highness | Your Royal Highness |
| Prince Naif bin 'Abd al-'Aziz | |
| Minister of the Interior | |
| Ministry of the Interior | |
| Riyadh | |
| Kingdom of Saudi Arabia | |
| Telegrams: Minister Interior, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia | |
| Telexes: 404416 DMMOI SJ (Riyadh) | |
| 603788 AMN SJ (Jeddah) | |
| Faxes: 966-1-4050130 | |

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO: diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia in your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 May 1992.