

Theme leaflets (5)

AI Index: MDE 23/08/00

Saudi Arabia

Alone, afraid and abused

Migrant workers

“Madam... I ask you in the name of God and humanity... to help me because I have no one who could help me here in Saudi Arabia. My poor family has done everything they could but I believe they have lost hope... I beg you madam to understand my letter... In this prison... we cannot have contact with the outside world, we cannot defend ourselves...”

The woman who wrote this letter is currently held on murder charges and possibly under sentence of death. Like most foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia’s jails, she has no one to turn to in the country for support or protection.

Everyone in Saudi Arabia is at risk of human rights violations. However, foreign nationals, particularly those from poorer countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, are especially vulnerable to abuse.

Many migrant workers suffer at the hands of their employers, on whom they are completely dependent. Some are not paid. Some are beaten. Some are raped. If arrested, foreign nationals may be deceived or coerced into signing a confession in Arabic, a language they may not understand. They are frequently tortured and ill-treated. They are more likely than Saudi Arabians to be sentenced to death and the judicial punishments of flogging and amputation.

They are forced to suffer in silence and solitude. They are given no information about the system that will decide their fate and sometimes no clue as to the nature of that fate, even if it is the death penalty. They are usually denied prompt contact with their friends, family or consular officials, and are never allowed legal representation in court. Almost all of them lack the support, influence or money to seek pardon, commutation or reduction of their sentence.

Friends and families suffer too. They are not told what is happening to their loved ones and are usually powerless to help them.

Soleha Anam, an Indonesian domestic worker found guilty of murdering her employer, was executed in 1997. Her family tried to get help from the Indonesian Embassy and the labour supply company, but were brushed aside. They only learned of her execution when the press reported it. Her father, a 70-year-old tenant farmer, said:

“I am also sorry because there was no help for Soleha... I am a small person, I am nothing... I just wish someone would help to bring her body home so she can be buried here.”

[box text]

A life at risk

Sit Zainab, a 32-year-old Indonesian domestic

worker, is reported to be currently detained, possibly in a police station in Medina, on charges of murdering her employer. She is alleged to have “confessed” to the crime under police interrogation, but no information is available about any trial that might have taken place. According to reports, police suspect that she is psychologically ill. Amnesty International fears that she is at risk of execution.

Write to the Saudi Arabian authorities and ask them to:

- * Provide details of the legal proceedings against Sit Zainab and guarantees that she will not be sentenced to death.
- * Initiate an independent study to look into why the majority of victims of execution and amputation are foreign nationals and to issue recommendations to provide them with better protection against torture and irreversible cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments.

- * Ensure that foreign nationals are guaranteed legal counsel and an interpreter immediately after arrest and in court.
- * Ensure that families of those arrested are immediately informed of the arrest of their relatives.
- * Guarantee that consulate or embassy staff are informed of the detention of their nationals and allowed communication with them.

Addresses:

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His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin
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Every day people in Saudi Arabia suffer violations of their basic human rights. Their suffering is perpetuated and hidden by a system based on secrecy and fear, and is largely ignored by the world’s governments.

Anyone who dares voice dissent is likely to be imprisoned. Women face systemic discrimination. Anyone not in a position of influence is at risk of arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly members of religious minorities and those deemed to have broken the country’s strict moral codes.

People are arrested with little or no explanation. They are denied access to a lawyer. They are tortured and ill-treated. They are convicted after secret and summary trials, sometimes solely on the basis of confessions extracted under duress. They face punishments including execution, amputation and flogging and in all cases have no meaningful right of appeal.

The Saudi Arabian government refuses to allow outside scrutiny of its human rights record and has ignored Amnesty International’s many requests for information, constructive dialogue or implementation of reforms that would protect human rights.

Amnesty International is stepping up the pressure. It is issuing a series of documents to highlight the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia and to demand action from the authorities and the international community to put an end to the secrecy and suffering in Saudi Arabia.

Please join us! Your help is needed.

Caption

Front photo: Soleha Anam © Private

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