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Saudi Arabia: Death sentence and flogging should not be imposed

Amnesty International today is appealing to the King of Saudi Arabia urging that no death sentence or flogging are imposed on Debrorah Parry and Lucille McLauchlan who are reported to have been found guilty of murder charges.

“Resorting to human rights violations is no way to mete out justice,” Amnesty International said. “Executions amount to the ultimate violation of the right to life and flogging is nothing short of cruel and inhuman treatment.”

The organization said that at least 107 people -- including 68 foreign nationals -- have been executed so far in 1997. Flogging is a punishment handed down by courts on an almost daily basis.

“The organization has frequently appealed to the king to commute death sentences and flogging, including in the case of Sarah Dematera, a Filipino national. Thousands of appeals have been sent, though she is still currently still under sentence of death,” Amnesty International said.

Debrorah Parry, age 38 and Lucille McLauchlan, age 31, both British nurses working in Saudi Arabia, were reportedly found guilty of murdering their Australian colleague Yvonne Gilford in December 1996. They were apparently convicted by the Shari’a court in Khobar, eastern Saudi Arabia, following trials which were held mainly in closed sessions.

Reports suggest that Lucille McLauchlan was sentenced to 500 lashes in addition to eight years’ imprisonment. The status of Debrorah Parry remains unclear although she is said to have been found guilty of intentional murder which carries the death penalty.

“This is typical of trial proceedings in Saudi Arabia which are always conducted behind closed doors, with the defendants and their relatives kept in total darkness regarding the progress of their cases through the different stages of the judicial process,” Amnesty International said.

When Deborah Parry and Lucille McLauchlan were given access to lawyers before their trial began, Amnesty International hoped that this would set a precedent for defendants throughout Saudi Arabia to have the opportunity of defence by legal assistance as this had not been a rule before. However, it is the organization’s understanding that the lawyers were not allowed to defend them in court and scrutinize any evidence produced against them. The other people, including foreign nationals, who have been executed so far this year did not have access to lawyers at any stage of their trial proceedings.

The conviction of the two nurses may be subject to review by higher courts but this as a rule takes place behind closed doors and does not amount to an appeal as required by international standards.

Amnesty International recognizes the right of states to bring to justice those convicted of recognizable criminal offences. However, it unconditionally opposes the use of the death

penalty and punishments amounting to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment against anyone regardless of ethnic origin, religion, colour, sex or language.

The human rights organization is strongly urging the king to commute all outstanding death sentences and sentences of flogging and to bring Saudi Arabia's trial proceedings of people facing such punishments in line with international standards.

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