

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 23/011/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 035
19 February 2007

Saudi Arabia: Amnesty International appeals to King Abdullah to commute all death sentences

Amnesty International is deeply concerned at the alarming increase in the rate of executions in Saudi Arabia after four Sri Lankan men were executed this morning bringing the total number of those executed so far this year to at least 17 people. The organization fears that other executions may be imminent and is urging King Abdullah to commute all death sentences and ensure respect of fair trial guarantees for those facing the death penalty.

This morning four Sri Lankan men were executed in the capital Riyadh. Amnesty International had repeatedly appealed to the Saudi Arabian authorities on behalf of three of the men. D.D. Ranjith De Silva, E.J. Victor Corea, Sanath Pushpakumara and Sharmila Sangeeth Kumara were reportedly arrested in 2004 in connection with a series of violent armed robberies. While the first three named men were sentenced to death, Sharmila Sangeeth Kumara believed that he had been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment and was not at risk of death. The men received an unfair trial and were sentenced in the absence of legal and consular representation. The men's families and the Sri Lankan authorities were not informed of their executions beforehand.

Saudi Arabia's secretive judicial system is such that in many cases those sentenced to death and their families are not informed of the charges or the progress of the legal proceedings against them. In a similar situation in April 2005 six Somali men were executed after an unfair trial. All the men were unaware that they were at risk of death and believed that they had served their sentences and were awaiting release despite having completed their sentences.

Furthermore, defendants may be convicted solely on the basis of "confessions" obtained under duress, including torture or other ill-treatment and trials invariably fall short of international standards for fair trial. Trial proceedings take place behind closed doors, without the defendants being given the right to legal representation, and in the case of foreign nationals, without adequate or no access to consular assistance.

Amnesty International recognizes the right and responsibility of all governments to bring to justice those guilty of recognizably criminal offences. However, the organization opposes the death penalty as the ultimate violation of the right to life. The organization is committed to defending all people against the violations of these fundamental and internationally recognized rights.

The organization repeats its earlier calls to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to commute all outstanding death sentences and ensure that all trial proceedings of people facing such punishment are conducted strictly in accordance with international standards for fair trial.

Background

Those executed so far this year include four Sri Lankans, three Pakistanis, two Iraqis, one Nigerian and seven Saudi Arabians including one woman.