

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 25/002/2002

EXTRA 34/02

Fear of forcible return/
Fear of unlawful killing

30 April 2002

UNITED ARAB

EMIRATES (UAE) Sabrina Imtiaz Syed (f) aged 25, Pakistani national
/PAKISTAN

The UAE authorities reportedly intend to forcibly return Sabrina Imtiaz Syed to Pakistan, possibly as early as 2 May. Her family in Pakistan have reportedly said that they will kill her, because she has married against her father's wishes. Amnesty International believes her life to be in grave danger.

Sabrina Imtiaz Syed lives with her family in Dubai, where she was born and raised. In January 2000 she asked her father, a Shi'a Muslim cleric, for his permission to marry Ashfaq Muhammad, a Pakistani national. Her father reportedly refused because Ashfaq Muhammad is a Sunni Muslim.

After several months of trying without success to secure his permission, the couple flew to Pakistan where they secretly married in September 2000. The following day they returned to Dubai, and continued to live with their respective parents, pleading continually with Sabrina Imtiaz Syed's parents for permission to marry.

In February 2002 the couple told Sabrina Imtiaz Syed's parents that they were already married, and moved into an apartment together. Her parents reportedly came to the apartment with two other people and severely beat the couple. Ashfaq Muhammad reported what had happened to the local police, but they reportedly took no action. The couple then flew to Pakistan, but while they were there Sabrina's relatives threatened to kill her. The couple decided to seek asylum in Germany and arrived there on 20 March 2002.

Sabrina's parents asked her to return to Dubai, saying they were ready to accept her marriage. She returned on 18 April, but was arrested on arrival at the airport and taken to an "immigration jail". Her father met her there and allegedly told her that he had asked the authorities to revoke her visa and send her back to Pakistan, where his relatives would kill her for "dishonouring" the family by marrying against his wishes.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of women are murdered by their own relatives every year in Pakistan, for actions that damage the perception of a man's "honour", such as seeking divorce, marrying without permission or being unfaithful. These are known as "honour killings". The woman's family often collude with the killer: the law of *qisas* allows a murder victim's family to forgive the killer, meaning that those who kill for "honour" can escape trial or any punishment.

Other violence committed in the name of 'honour' includes throwing acid at women to disfigure them, and other forms of domestic violence.

The Government of Pakistan has condemned such violence on several occasions, and promised remedies. However, Amnesty International has found that although there have been a few positive changes in the area of women's rights, by and large the state still fails to provide adequate protection for women.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic or your own language:

- urging the authorities to ensure that Sabrina Imtiaz Syed will not be forcibly returned to Pakistan, where she would be at risk of unlawful killing;
- asking the authorities to facilitate access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who could assist in arranging her resettlement to a third country;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Sabrina Imtiaz Syed has access to legal counsel;
- pointing out that under international law, the United Arab Emirates may not forcibly return anyone to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights abuses.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

His Highness Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al-Maktoum (c/o Deputy Prime Minister's office)

Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 12848, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Telegram: Prime Minister, Dubai, UAE

Fax: + 971 2 665 1962 (Please ask for fax to be forwarded to Prime Minister's office)

Salutation: Your Highness

Minister of Interior

His Excellency
General Dr Mohammad Saeed al-Badi
Minister of Interior
PO Box 398, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Telegram: Interior Minister, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Fax: + 971 2 441 4899 (Please ask for faxes to be forwarded to the President and the Prime Minister)

Salutation: Your Excellency

President

His Highness
al-Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan
President of the United Arab Emirates
Manhal Palace
PO Box 280, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Telegram: President Al-Nahyan, Abu Dhabi, UAE

Telex: 22220 PALACE EM

Salutation: Your Highness

COPIES TO: Diplomatic representatives of the United Arab Emirates accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.