

23 May 2001

Further information on UA 253/00 (MDE 23/68/00, 24 August 2000) and follow-ups (MDE 23/74/00, 22 September 2000, and MDE 23/81/00, 30 November 2000) - Reports of torture/Possible prisoner of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim, aged 39

Amnesty International has learned that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim was allegedly tortured during his first five months in custody. He is said to have been beaten all over his body, denied sleep and suspended from the ceiling by his legs. Amnesty International had previously asked the Saudi Arabian authorities for assurances that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim would be protected from torture.

Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim was arrested in August 2000. He was charged with carrying out opposition activities against the government, and travelling to Iran and Iraq without Saudi Arabian government permission.

He was tried in secret at the *al-Mabahith al-'Ammah* (General Investigations) prison, where he had been held since he was arrested. He is believed to have been moved to Dammam Central prison on about 10 May.

Amnesty International is concerned that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim may have been imprisoned solely for activities relating to his Shi'a religious beliefs, and if so would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim, a father of five, was reportedly arrested when returning from a holiday in Syria on 11 August 2000. Prior to this, he was summoned to the headquarters of the *al-Mabahith al-'Ammah* asked to write a detailed report about the countries he had visited, and suspected political opponents of the Saudi Arabian government he might have known.

Shi'a Muslims and political opponents of the government face widespread arbitrary arrest and detention in Saudi Arabia. Members of faiths other than Sunni Islam are not permitted to practice their religions in public, and risk arrest even if they do so in private. Such fear of prosecution prevents members of the Shi'a religion from practising their faith freely.

Those suspected of political or religious dissent often risk arbitrary arrest and indefinite detention without charge or trial. Such detainees are regularly subjected to torture. In the rare instances when they are charged and brought to trial, the proceedings invariably fail to meet the most elementary standards of fairness.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at allegations that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim was tortured in custody, and asking the authorities to investigate these allegations and make the findings public;
- seeking assurances that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim will be protected from torture and given regular access to his family, lawyers and any medical attention he needs;

- expressing concern that Sheikh 'Ali bin 'Ali al-Ghanim may have been imprisoned solely for the non-violent expression of his conscientiously-held beliefs, and as such would be a prisoner of conscience, in which case he should be released without delay.

APPEALS TO:

King and Prime Minister

The Custodian of the Two Holy Shrines

His Majesty King Fahd bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud,
Office of H.M. The King, Royal Court,
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegram: King Fahd, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Salutation: Your Majesty

Minister of the Interior

His Royal Highness Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz,
Minister of the Interior, Ministry of the Interior,
P.O. Box 2933, Airport Road,
Riyadh 11134, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegram: Minister of Interior, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 1185

Telex: 404416

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Royal Highness Prince Saud al-Faisal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Nasseriya Street,
Riyadh 11124, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegram: Foreign Affairs Minister, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 403 0159

Telex: 405000

Salutation: Your Royal Highness

Minister of Justice

His Excellency Dr. 'Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim Al-Sheikh
Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice
University Street,
Riyadh 11137, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegram: Minister of Justice, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Fax: + 966 1 401 1741

Telex: 405 980 MINJUS SJ

Salutation: Your Excellency

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 July 2001.