

Theme leaflets (5)

AI Index: MDE 23/11/00

Saudi Arabia

Stop arming the torturers

Military, security and police relations

“They made me take off my clothes and then threatened me with rape. They also used other forms of ill-treatment and torture, including falaqa [beating on the soles of the feet], beatings all over the body, and being jolted by an electrified rod.”

These are the words of an Iraqi refugee in Saudi Arabia, who was tortured in 1992. His experience is not unique. Gulam Mustapha, a Pakistani, was reportedly tortured while in detention in a centre for drug offenders in Jeddah in 1994. The torture he suffered included insertion of a metal stick or rod into his anus and electric shocks, which apparently left him bleeding and unable to walk.

So who has supplied the electro-shock batons to the torturers in Saudi Arabia? Secrecy prevents a comprehensive answer, but it is known that in 1993 the UK government granted two licences for the transfer of electro-shock weapons to Saudi Arabia and that since 1984 the US Department of Commerce has authorized at least a dozen such shipments.

Despite Saudi Arabia's appalling human rights record, foreign governments have supplied the country with other equipment that could be used to torture or ill-treat prisoners. For example, between 1980 and 1993 the US government authorized licences worth \$5 million under the category OA82C, which includes thumb cuffs, leg irons, shackles, handcuffs and other police equipment.

People formerly imprisoned in Saudi Arabia have described the devastating effect of the use of leg restraints such as shackles and chains contrary to UN regulations for the treatment of prisoners. A former prisoner, released in 1999, told Amnesty International that the “use of handcuffs and shackles is standard operating procedure. [They] are placed even on lame and blind people.” Former prisoners have stated that such restraints were stamped with the name “Hiatts”, a UK company, or “Smith & Wesson”, a US company.

Phil Lomax, a UK national, explained how shackles are routinely used in Malaz prison, Riyadh, where he was held for 17 days in mid-1999 in connection with alcohol offences.

“When[ever] we were taken out of the cell we were shackled and handcuffed. The shackles were very painful. They were made of steel... like a handcuff ring. The handcuffs were made in the USA. If you're taken out with other people you are shackled to the other people.”

Donato Lama, a Filipino who was arrested in October 1995 for preaching Christianity, said he was shackled and handcuffed as well as beaten while under interrogation during two weeks' incommunicado detention. During his trial he was forced to stand in front of the judge with his legs chained and wearing handcuffs. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and 70 lashes. He described how restraints were frequently used on those in prison:

“They would handcuff your hands and hang them on a post [and] you would have to stand for two to five hours... When our embassy officials would come and visit us... they would handcuff us and shackle also our legs, and handcuff [us together] and shackle together our legs... Sometimes it would hurt your legs with bruising. Sometimes the guard would drag you; it would be very hard to walk.”

Donato Lama was also shackled and handcuffed when the 70 lashes were administered in a single session shortly before his release in May 1997.

Saudi Arabia is one of the largest procurers of defence equipment in the world. According to one study, total defence spending was estimated at US\$ 18.2 billion in 1997 alone. The defence industries of the USA, UK, France, Germany, Canada, Italy and Belgium are among those that have benefited.

The majority of this trade has been in weaponry such as fighter aircraft that has not been proven to be used in human rights violations. However, the secrecy surrounding the deals means that the public can never be sure what is actually being provided. For example, in 1995 a British Aerospace

(now BAE Systems) salesman claimed on television to have arranged the transfer of 8,000 electro-shock batons to Saudi Arabia as part of the multi-billion dollar al-Yamamah project, the biggest arms deal ever agreed between the UK and Saudi Arabian governments. The UK government and British Aerospace denied selling the batons, but details of the al-Yamamah deal have never been made public.

Saudi Arabia's human rights record shows why stringent national and international controls are needed for the arms and security industry — controls that guarantee public accountability and ensure that weapons never fall into the hands of those likely to use them for torture or other human rights abuses.

Write to your own government and to the governments of the USA and UK.
Call on them to:

- * Publicly condemn the routine use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in Saudi Arabia's police stations, detention centres and prisons.
- * Immediately ban the transfer of leg irons, shackles, electro-shock devices and execution equipment to Saudi Arabia. Prohibit the manufacture, promotion, use or transfer of all equipment solely used for executions or for carrying out torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. When writing to the UK government, welcome the UK ban on the manufacture and export of torture equipment, introduced in 1997, and ask how the ban is being enforced.
- * Provide the public with detailed and regular information about all prospective and completed military, security and police transfers by both private companies and government agencies to Saudi Arabia. The information should include detailed monitoring to ensure that weapons are not being misused in Saudi Arabia or diverted to another recipient.
- * Enact legislation and regulations to prohibit the transfer of all military, security and police weaponry, equipment, personnel or training unless such transfers will not contribute to human rights abuses.

Addresses:

- * Rt Hon Stephen Byers MP
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry
Department of Trade and Industry
1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET
United Kingdom
- * William M. Daley
Secretary of Commerce
14th St & Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20230, USA
- * The Minister of Foreign Affairs in your country.

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.

Captions

Front photo: Picture of leg cuffs as advertised in a brochure produced by US company Smith & Wesson

Donato Lama (c) Private

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