

URGENT ACTION

SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR "SORCERY"

A Lebanese national has been sentenced to death for "sorcery" by a court in Saudi Arabia, and could be executed at any time if his sentence is upheld by the Supreme Court. Another man has been sentenced to death for "apostasy" on grounds relating to "sorcery."



'Ali Hussain Sibat, who is 46 and has five children, was arrested by the Mutawa'een (religious police) in May 2008, in his hotel room in the city of Madina. He had travelled to Saudi Arabia to perform a form of Muslim pilgrimage, the *'umra*. He was sentenced to death by a court in Madina on 9 November after secret court hearings where he had no legal representation or assistance. Although Amnesty International does not have precise details of the charges on which he was convicted, it has received reports that they were based on the accusation that he had engaged in "sorcery" and is concerned that this arose solely from his exercising his right to freedom of expression.

'Ali Sibat was a presenter on a TV show on the Lebanese satellite station Sheherazade, where he gave advice and predictions about the future. His lawyer in Lebanon believes that 'Ali Sibat was arrested because members of the Mutawa'een had recognized him from the show. 'Ali Sibat's interrogators told him to write down what he did for a living, reassuring him that, if he did so, he would be allowed to go home after a few weeks. This document was presented in court as a "confession," and used to convict him.

In July, a court in the city of Hail sentenced to death another man on grounds relating to "sorcery." His name is unknown but has been reported in the Saudi Arabian press as "the magician of female TV presenters" because he included names of TV presenters in graffiti written on the walls of his house. Members of the Mutawa'een raided the man's home on 22 February and according to the Saudi Arabian press found it covered in some 100,000 words of graffiti, including distorted verses from the Qur'an. Very little is known about his trial, but the court apparently convicted him on "apostasy" rather than "sorcery" charges according to a press report this was because he was considered "a beginner in the work of sorcery." The man has appealed.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Urging the King to halt the execution of 'Ali Sibat and the man sentenced to death in Hail in July, if their sentences are upheld by the Supreme Court;
- Calling on the authorities to release 'Ali Sibat and the other man immediately and unconditionally if they have been convicted solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression;
- Urging the authorities to desist from charging and convicting people for "apostasy," as it violates the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 19 JANUARY 2010 TO:

King and Prime Minister

His Majesty King 'Abdullah Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud
The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: (via Ministry of the Interior)
+966 1 403 1185 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Majesty

Second Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior

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

Fax: +966 1 403 1185 (please keep trying)
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

And copies to:

President, Human Rights Commission
Bandar Mohammed 'Abdullah al- Aiban
Human Rights Commission
P.O. Box 58889, King Fahad Road,
Building No. 373, Riyadh 11515
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Fax: +966 1 461 2061
Email: hrc@haq-ksa.org
Salutation: Dear Mr al-Aiban

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Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The crime of "sorcery" is not defined, and has been used to punish people for the legitimate exercise of their human rights, including the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, belief and expression. The criminalization of apostasy is incompatible with the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as set out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

At least 158 people were executed in 2007, and at least 102 in 2008. Since the beginning of 2009, a further 67 people are known to have been executed. Amnesty International is aware of at least 140 people currently on death row, of whom 104 are foreign nationals. The true figures are believed to be much higher.

Saudi Arabia applies the death penalty for a wide range of offences, including some with no lethal consequences. Court proceedings fall far short of international standards for fair trial. Defendants are rarely allowed formal representation by a lawyer, and in many cases are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. They may be convicted solely on the basis of confessions obtained under duress or deception.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have arrested scores of people for "sorcery" this year. A number of them were arrested by the Mutawa'een (religious police), which is officially referred to as the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. The last known execution for "sorcery" was that of Egyptian national Mustafa Ibrahim, on 2 November 2007. He had been arrested in May 2007 in the town of Arar, where he worked as a pharmacist, and accused of "apostasy" for having degraded a copy of the Qur'an.

In a report issued last year on the use of the death penalty in Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International highlighted the extensive use of the death penalty as well as the disproportionately high number of executions of foreign nationals from developing countries. For further information please see *Saudi Arabia: Affront to Justice: Death Penalty in Saudi Arabia* (Index: MDE 23/027/2008), 14 October 2008: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/saudi-arabia-executions-target-foreign-nationals-20081014>

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