

PUBLIC

AI Index: MDE 23/012/2002

4 December 2002

Further information on EXTRA 06/02 (MDE 23/001/2002, 17 January 2002) Fear of execution/Possible prisoners of conscience

SAUDI ARABIA

**Duhayman Muhammad al-Hatila (m), aged 34
Mish'il al-Hussain Barman bel-Harith (m), aged 22
and at least 15 others (names unknown)**

Amnesty International welcomes the decision by King Fahd, announced by the Minister of the Interior on 4 December, to commute the death sentences against 17 men from the Ismaili community in Saudi Arabia to ten years' imprisonment. The men, who are held in al-Hair prison in Riyadh, may be prisoners of conscience, held solely for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs.

The Minister did not refer to any of the prisoners by name, but Amnesty International believes that they include Duhayman Muhammad al-Hatila and Mish'il al-Hussain Barman bel-Harith. The Minister announced that 70 others arrested with the 17 men are also serving prison sentences. Amnesty International is concerned that they too may be prisoners of conscience.

All the prisoners were arrested in April 2000 following protests by members of the Ismaili religious community in Najran, south-west Saudi Arabia. The protests took place following the closure of their mosque by Saudi Arabian security forces and the arrest of Hussein Ismail al-Makrami on suspicion of practising "sorcery".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Saudi Arabia applies the death penalty for a wide range of offences which, in addition to violent crimes, includes others such as sorcery, certain sexual offences, drug-related offences and apostasy (converting from Islam to another religion). Trials invariably fall short of internationally agreed standards for fairness, as they are held in secret and defendants do not have the right to formal representation by a lawyer. In many cases defendants and their families are not informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them. Defendants may also be convicted solely on the basis of confessions obtained under duress, torture or deception.

Many thanks to all who sent appeals. Amnesty International will continue to monitor this case, and will use longer-term campaigning methods on behalf of the prisoners. If possible, please send a final round of appeals, to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- welcoming King Fahd's decision to commute the death sentences of the 17 men but seeking clarification of the charges against them, together with details of their trial proceedings;
- seeking assurances that the men are being treated humanely and have access to relatives and medical care as necessary;
- urging that anyone held solely for the non-violent expression of their conscientiously held beliefs is released immediately and unconditionally.

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

Telegrams: King Fahd, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Salutation: Your Majesty.

Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Commander of the National Guard

His Royal Highness Prince Abdullah bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Saud

Royal Court, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Telegrams: H.R.H Prince Abdullah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Salutation: Your Royal Highness

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

Fax: + 966 1 403 1185
Telegram: Minister of Interior, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
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

Fax: + 966 1 401 1741
Telegram: Minister of Justice, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Salutation: Your Excellency

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

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.