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## **Saudi Arabia: Deportees should not be ill-treated**

Amnesty International calls on the Saudi Arabian authorities to respect the human rights of the illegal immigrants who are currently the subject of an official campaign of deportation of those residing in the country without a valid residence permit.

The campaign has been carried out intermittently for at least the last two years. The current campaign began in April 2000 with the government announcement widely disseminated in the media, calling on those who are illegally overstaying in the country to regularize their status or leave before the end of a grace period.

In April, a Saudi Arabian official warned overstayers and residents without permits that after the expiry of the grace period on 2 July 2000, no one would be allowed to leave the country without paying a fine and being questioned to find out the individuals, families or companies which were harboring them.

The French News Agency (AFP) reported on 4 July that the Saudi Arabian authorities announced a fine of more than 26,000 US dollars on those who are overstaying in Saudi Arabia without residence permits, a sum of money which is not affordable by many of them. The consequences for those who fail to pay are not clear to Amnesty International, although they could include lengthy imprisonment and thereby further exposure to human rights violations.

An official from the immigration department was reported to have said that some 350,000 illegal foreign workers have already left Saudi Arabia. Amnesty International is concerned that anyone unable to leave the country before the expiry of the amnesty offered may face imprisonment, probably in incommunicado detention and may be ill-treated or tortured.

"Foreign nationals from poor countries are particularly vulnerable to ill treatment by police forces with no one to turn to for help," Amnesty International said, " it is unlikely that those who would be questioned would have access to legal aid or their countries' diplomatic missions."

Amnesty International calls on the international community to seek assurances that those who are found without residence permits in Saudi Arabia do not have their human rights abused and are not deported to countries where they may be at risk of serious human rights violations.

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