

PUBLIC

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To: Health professionals
From: Medical team / Middle East Program
Date: 18 August 2000

MEDICAL LETTER WRITING ACTION

**Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad
Saudi Arabia**

Key words torture / punitive surgery / medical ethics

Summary

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at reports that Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad had his left eye surgically removed at King Fahd Hospital in Medina, Saudi Arabia, in early August 2000 in a punishment ordered by the city's court. Amnesty International believes that, if confirmed, this punishment would constitute a form of torture and be contrary to international human rights standards which Saudi Arabia has ratified. In addition, the surgeon's participation in the punishment would be contrary to the Hippocratic Oath, the UN Principles of Medical Ethics and the World Medical Association's Declarations of Geneva and Tokyo.

Recommended actions

Please write letters to the addresses below:

- expressing grave concern at reports originating in *Okaz* newspaper that Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad had his eye surgically removed at the King Fahd hospital in Medina in early August 2000 as punishment for an attack against a man carried out in 1994, asking for further information on these reports and asking if these reports are correct;
- expressing concern that such punitive surgery would be contrary to international law, including the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and to international codes of medical ethics such as the UN Principles of Medical Ethics and the World Medical Association's Declarations of Geneva and Tokyo;
- urging the authorities to abolish punishments which constitute torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow up letter seeking a response. Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 25 October 2000, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Addresses

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

Minister of Health
His Excellency
Dr. Osama bin Abdul Majeed Shoboksi
Minister of Health, Ministry of Health
Airport Road, Riyadh 11176, Saudi Arabia
Fax : +966 1 402 9876
Telegram: Minister of Health, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Salutation: Your Excellency

Letters to hospital

In addition, please write a polite letter to the Director, King Fahd Hospital, referring to reports originating in *Okaz* in early August 2000 stating that a man, named as Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad, had his left eye removed by a surgeon for punitive rather than medical reasons. Ask if the reports are correct and express your deepest concern if the reports are true, such surgery would be contrary to international medical ethics shared by doctors around the world. Seek assurances that no such punitive operation will be permitted in the King Fahd Hospital.

Director
King Fahd Hospital
P.O. Box 3892
Medina, Saudi Arabia
Fax: +966 4 823 3340

Copies

Please send copies to diplomatic representatives of Saudi Arabia accredited to your country.

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MEDICAL CONCERN

Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad
Saudi Arabia

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at reports that Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad had his left eye surgically removed at King Fahd Hospital in Medina, Saudi Arabia, in early August 2000 in a punishment ordered by the city's court. Amnesty International believes that, if confirmed, this punishment would constitute a form of torture and be contrary to international human rights standards which Saudi Arabia has ratified. In addition, the surgeon's participation in the punishment would be contrary to the Hippocratic Oath, the UN Principles of Medical Ethics and the World Medical Association's Declarations of Geneva and Tokyo.

Background information

The Saudi Arabia *Okaz* newspaper was reported by newsagencies on 14 and 15 August 2000 as stating that Abdel Moti Abdel Rahman Mohammad, a 37-year-old Egyptian, had been found guilty of disfiguring Shahata Ajami Mahmoud, a 53-year-old Egyptian, by throwing acid at his face and damaging his left eye. Medina's city court applied the principle of an eye for an eye when sentencing Abdel Moti. The newspaper claimed that Abdel Moti was weeping when the sentence was carried out, asking God to pardon his act and saying he deserved the punishment. *Okaz* said this was the first such punishment in 40 years.

Shahata Mahmoud remains disfigured despite numerous surgical operations. He had been offered 800,000 riyals (approximately U\$ 213,000) compensation if he would pardon Abdel Moti. Shahata Mahmoud said he refused to pardon Abdel Moti in order to stop his family in Egypt taking revenge on Abdel Moti's relatives. He said he had not returned to Egypt as he did not want his family to see him disfigured.

Medical ethics and human rights

Saudi Arabia continues to impose a number of punishments contrary to international law, including amputations and floggings. The punishment of surgically removing an eye is in contradiction with both international law and international codes of medical ethics.

Saudi Arabia is party to the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, which states that no circumstances whatsoever may be invoked as a justification of torture. The *UN Principles of Medical Ethics*¹ address the issue as follows:

Principle 2

It is a gross contravention of medical ethics, as well as an offence under applicable international instruments, for health personnel, particularly physicians, to engage, actively or passively, in acts which constitute participation in, complicity in, incitement to or attempts to commit torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Principle 4

¹UN Principles of Medical Ethics Relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

It is a contravention of medical ethics for health personnel, particularly physicians, to (..) participate in any way in the infliction of any treatment or punishment which is not in accordance with the relevant international instruments.

The World Medical Association's *Declaration of Geneva*, a modern equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath first adopted in 1948 and most recently amended in 1994, includes the following:

"I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity(..);
The health of the patient will be my first consideration (..);
I will maintain the utmost respect for human life from its beginning even under threat and I will not use my medical knowledge contrary to the laws of humanity."

In 1975 the World Medical Association adopted the Declaration of Tokyo, which is the most comprehensive statement produced by the medical profession on the question of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of detainees. It states that:

1. The doctor shall not countenance, condone or participate in the practice of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading procedures, whatever the offence of which the victim of such procedures is suspected, accused or guilty (..).
2. The doctor shall not provide any premises, instruments, substances or knowledge to facilitate the practice of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or to diminish the ability of the victim to resist such treatment.