

AI Index: PRE 01/293/2011
10 June 2011

Saudi Arabia: Surge in executions in recent weeks

The Saudi Arabian authorities must halt the use of the death penalty, Amnesty International said today, following a significant increase in executions in the country in the last six weeks.

At least 27 people have been executed in Saudi Arabia in 2011, the same as the total number of people executed in the whole of 2010. Fifteen people were executed in May alone.

“The Saudi Arabian authorities must halt this disturbing pattern, which puts the country at odds with the worldwide trend against the death penalty,” said Philip Luther, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

“Amnesty International is aware of over 100 prisoners, many of whom are foreign nationals, currently on death row. The Saudi authorities must immediately stop executions and commute all death sentences, with a view to abolishing the death penalty completely,” he added.

Two brothers, Muhammad Jaber Shahbah al-Ja’id, 54, and Sa’ud Jaber Shahbah al-Ja’id, 47, are at imminent risk of execution.

They were sentenced to death in 1998 by a court in Makkah, for the murder of another Saudi Arabian man.

In April 2011 their sentences were said to have been ratified by the King and it is feared that they could be executed at any time, although no date is known to have been set.

They did not have access to a lawyer during their pre-trial investigation or their trial.

Furthermore, it appears that Sa’ud Jaber Shahbah al-Ja’id confessed to the murder under duress as the authorities reportedly arrested his elderly father in order to place pressure on him.

“Amnesty International is opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances, but it is particularly appalling that Muhammad and Sa’ud al-Ja’id were sentenced to death after a trial in which they received no legal assistance,” said Philip Luther.

“However strongly the Saudi Arabian authorities support the death penalty, they must at least recognize that no one should be executed after such problematic legal proceedings and commute their death sentences.”

Five of those executed this year are foreign nationals. Amnesty International has previously documented the disproportionately high number of executions of foreign nationals from developing countries.

At least 158 people, including 76 foreign nationals, were executed by the Saudi Arabian authorities in 2007. In 2008 some 102 people, including almost 40 foreign nationals, were executed.

In 2009, at least 69 people are known to have been executed, including 19 foreign nationals and in 2010, at least 27 people were executed including six foreign nationals.

Saudi Arabia applies the death penalty for a wide range of offences. 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.