

AI Index: PRE 01/486/2011
27 September 2011

Flogging sentence for Saudi Arabian woman after driving “beggars belief”

The sentencing of a Saudi Arabian woman to 10 lashes after she drove a car demonstrates the scale of discrimination against women in the Kingdom, Amnesty International said today.

“Flogging is a cruel punishment in all circumstances but it beggars belief that the authorities in Saudi Arabia have imposed lashes on a woman apparently for merely driving a car,” said Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director Philip Luther.

“Belatedly allowing women to vote in council elections is all well and good, but if they are still going to face being flogged for trying to exercise their right to freedom of movement then the King’s much-trumpeted ‘reforms’ actually amount to very little.”

“Saudi Arabia needs to go much further. The whole system of women’s subordination to men in Saudi Arabia needs to be dismantled.”

The sentence was passed by a court in Jeddah today. Two other women are believed to be facing charges for driving, one in Jeddah and one in al-Khobar.

The Minister of Interior has formally banned women from driving in Saudi Arabia since 1990, when a group of women staged a driving protest to challenge a customary ban in place until then.

Earlier this year an online campaign called on women who hold international driving licences to start driving on Saudi Arabian roads.

The “Women2Drive” campaign has used Facebook and Twitter to encourage women to drive as part of their normal daily activities rather than converge in one place.

Corporal punishment, particularly flogging, is routinely imposed as a sentence by courts in Saudi Arabia.