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## **Saudi Arabia: Beheading for “sorcery” shocking**

The beheading of a woman convicted of “witchcraft and sorcery” is deeply shocking and highlights the urgent need for a halt in executions in Saudi Arabia, Amnesty International said today.

The Interior Ministry said that the woman, Amina bint Abdul Halim bin Salem Nasser, a Saudi Arabian national, was executed on Monday in the northern province of al-Jawf. It gave no further details of the charges against her.

“The charges of ‘witchcraft and sorcery’ are not defined as crimes in Saudi Arabia and to use them to subject someone to the cruel and extreme penalty of execution is truly appalling,” said Philip Luther Amnesty International’s interim Director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme.

“While we don’t know the details of the acts which the authorities accused Amina of committing, the charge of sorcery has often been used in Saudi Arabia to punish people, generally after unfair trials, for exercising their right to freedom of speech or religion.”

The execution is the second of its kind in recent months. In September a Sudanese national was beheaded in the Saudi Arabian city of Medina after being convicted on “sorcery” charges. He had allegedly confessed after being tortured and was tried without a lawyer.

The number of executions in Saudi Arabia has almost tripled this year. So far at least 79 people – including five women – have been executed there, compared to at least 27 in 2010.

Hundreds more people are believed to be under sentence of death, many of them convicted of drugs offences. They have often had no defence lawyer and in many cases have not been informed of the progress of legal proceedings against them.

“The huge rise in the number of executions in Saudi Arabia is deeply disturbing,” said Philip Luther. “We regularly call on the Saudi Arabian authorities to impose a moratorium with a view to abolishing the death penalty. Where the death penalty is used, under international law it should only be applied to the most serious crimes.”

Saudi Arabia applies the death penalty to a wide range of offences ranging from murder and rape to blasphemy, apostasy, sorcery, adultery and drugs-related offences.

In December 2010, Saudi Arabia was one of a minority of states voting against a UN General Assembly resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions.