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Saudi Arabia urged not to deliberately paralyse man as retribution punishment

Amnesty International has urged the Saudi Arabian authorities not to deliberately paralyse a man in retribution for similar injuries he allegedly caused during a fight.

Reports say a court in Tabuk, in the north-west of the country, had approached a number of hospitals about the possibility of cutting the man's spinal cord to carry out the punishment of qisas (retribution), as requested by the injured victim.

"We urge the Saudi Arabian authorities not to carry out such a punishment, which amounts to nothing less than torture. While those guilty of a crime should be held accountable, intentionally paralysing a man in this way would constitute torture, and be a breach of its international human rights obligations," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, acting director of the Middle East and North Africa Programme.

According to one report, one hospital said it would be possible to medically administer the injury at the same place on the spinal cord as the damage the man is alleged to have caused his victim using a cleaver, during a fight more than two years ago, causing similar paralysis.

The court may decide not to impose the paralysis punishment and could instead sentence the man to imprisonment, financial compensation, or flogging.

The man, whose name has not been made public, has already been sentenced to seven months imprisonment for the offence. Amnesty International has received information that he was convicted and sentenced following a trial where he was said to have had no legal assistance.

Under international human rights law, the use of this sentence would constitute a violation of the absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

It would contravene the UN Convention against Torture to which Saudi Arabia is a state party and the Principles of Medical Ethics adopted by the UN General Assembly.

Saudi Arabia regularly sentences people to various forms of corporal punishment.

Flogging is mandatory in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for a number of offences and can also be used at the discretion of judges as an alternative or in addition to other punishments.

In cases of qisas (retribution) other sentences passed have included eye-gouging, tooth extraction, and death in cases involving murder.

Background

According to the Principles of Medical Ethics adopted by the UN General Assembly, it is a gross contravention of medical ethics, as well as a breach of 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.