

AI Index: PRE 01/165/2013
02 April 2013

Saudi Arabia: News of paralysis sentence, “outrageous”

A ruling reportedly issued by a court in Saudi Arabia sentencing a man to paralysis as retribution for a crime he allegedly committed 10 years ago, is outrageous and should on no account be carried out, Amnesty International said today.

Recent reports in Saudi Arabian media have brought to light the case of 24-year-old Ali al-Khawahir, who was reportedly sentenced to qisas (retribution) in the town of Al-Ahsa and could be paralysed from the waist down unless he pays one million Saudi riyals --US\$ 270,000 -- in compensation to the victim.

Ali al-Khawahir had allegedly stabbed his friend in the back, rendering him paralysed from the waist down in or around 2003. Ali al-Khawahir was 14 years' old at the time.

“Paralysing someone as punishment for a crime would be torture,” said Ann Harrison, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

“That such a punishment might be implemented is utterly shocking, even in a context where flogging is frequently imposed as a punishment for some offences, as happens in Saudi Arabia.”

“It is time the authorities in Saudi Arabia start respecting their international legal obligations and remove these terrible punishments from the law.”

A similar sentence of paralysis imposed in 2010 is not known to have been carried out.

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

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

Punishment by amputation is also enforced in Saudi Arabia for offences mainly limited to cases of “theft”, for which the sentence is amputation of the right hand, and “highway robbery”, which is punished by cross amputation (right hand and left foot).

In cases of qisas (retribution) other sentences passed have included eye-gouging, tooth extraction, and death in cases of murder. In such cases, the victim can demand the punishment be carried out, request financial compensation or grant a conditional or unconditional pardon.

If implemented, the paralysis sentence 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.

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment has stated that “corporal punishment is inconsistent with the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” and has concluded that “any form of corporal

punishment is contrary to the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”.