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Yemen authorities accused of complicity in tribal extrajudicial execution

Amnesty International has urged the Yemeni authorities to launch an immediate independent investigation into the extrajudicial execution of a man accused of murdering a tribal sheikh. ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Muhsin al-Rajhi had been accused of murdering the sheikh, but instead of being arrested and brought to trial by the authorities, he was handed over to the victim’s family and summarily killed. He is reported to have been shot dead by a relative of the murdered sheikh on 18 July 2010 in front of a crowd outside a mosque in the village of al-Hajfa, south-east of the capital Sana’a. Amnesty International understands that the authorities, including the police, were aware of what was happening but did nothing to intervene and have taken no action against the perpetrators. “This killing was nothing less than “lynch law”, carried out apparently by agreement between the families of the sheikh and his alleged murderer and with the complicity of the police and local authorities,” said Malcolm Smart, Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme. “It must not be allowed to pass unpunished. The Yemeni authorities must ensure that those who carried out this unlawful killing are promptly brought to justice.” According to reports, ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Muhsin al-Rajhi was not handed over to the authorities because his family and relatives of the murdered sheikh decided that the process would take too long and prove costly for them. Instead, ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Muhsin al-Rajhi was made to sit facing the wall of the mosque in al-Haifa village, and then shot in the back at close range by a member of the murder victim’s family. The killing reportedly took place in front of a large crowd of villagers. ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Muhsin al-Rajhi was shot three times in the back and then further bullets were fired into his chest. His body was then removed by his family and buried. “Those accused of crimes must be treated in accordance with the law and their human rights must be respected, whatever they are alleged to have done,” said Malcolm Smart. “They must be arrested, charged and given a fair trial by the Yemeni judiciary and if convicted should have a right of appeal and should not be liable to the death penalty.” Following the murder of the sheikh, ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Muhsin al-Rajhi is said to have sought refuge in the nearby Hawlan region but to have been handed back by tribal leaders there to his family and tribal leaders from his village. There were then negotiations between his family and that of the sheikh, who are related, about a possible pardon and reconciliation but the sheikh’s relatives are said to have demanded that he be executed immediately. “This case is all the more shocking because of the alleged complicity of the police and other local authorities,” said Malcolm Smart. “Their role too must be investigated and they too must be held to account if they are found to have been allowed, and effectively condoned, this crime.”