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## **Saudi Arabia: 75-year-old woman faces 40 lashes**

The Saudi Arabian authorities must not carry out the imminent flogging and imprisonment of an elderly woman and two younger men, Amnesty International said today.

The Minister of Interior is reported to have ordered the immediate detention and flogging of a 75-year-old woman, Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi, along with two Saudi Arabian men known only as Fahad and Hadyan.

All three were found guilty in March 2009 of being in the company of members of the opposite sex who are not close relatives, known as khilwa. The verdict was subsequently upheld by a court of appeal. Attempts to lodge an appeal at the Supreme Court were recently rejected.

If imprisoned Amnesty International would consider all three to be prisoners of conscience as the organization considers the criminalization of khilwa to be a violation of the right to freedom of expression and to privacy as set out in international human rights standards.

“It is abhorrent that an elderly woman is at risk of 40 lashes. The flogging of any individual is cruel and inhumane,” said Philip Luther, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Programme. “We urge the authorities to prevent the imprisonment and flogging of Khamisa, Fahad and Hadyan.”

Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi and Fahad were sentenced to 40 lashes and four months’ imprisonment, and Hadyan to 60 lashes and six months’ imprisonment. Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi was also sentenced to be returned to her native country Syria on completion of her prison term.

### **Background**

Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi, Fahad and Hadyan were arrested on 21 April 2008 by members of the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (also known as the Mutawa’een or religious police).

At their first trial, Fahad and Hadyan stated in their defence that they were delivering bread to Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi. Fahad argued that the offence of khilwa did not apply since he was related to Khamisa Mohammed Sawadi, who breastfed him when he was a child. The court, however, rejected this argument.

Flogging is mandatory in 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.

Sentences can range from dozens to tens of thousands of lashes, and are usually carried out in instalments, at intervals ranging from two weeks to one month. The highest number of lashes imposed in a single case

recorded by Amnesty International was 40,000 lashes. They were imposed this year in a case of a man tried on murder charges.