

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 177/96 Imminent flogging / Possible prisoner of conscience

13 November 1996

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) Elie Dib Ghalib, Lebanese Christian, restaurant manager, aged 29

Amnesty International is urgently concerned at reports that Elie Dib Ghalib has been sentenced to 39 lashes and that his sentence will be carried out on 16 November 1996. The organization is also concerned that he appears to be a prisoner of conscience held on the grounds of his Christian religion and that he has allegedly been tortured.

Elie Dib Ghalib, a restaurant manager at the Intercontinental Hotel in al-'Ain in Abu Dhabi, was arrested on 5 December 1995 reportedly for having, as a Christian, married a Muslim woman, Mona, a UAE national (see below). He remained in detention while trial proceedings were initiated against him apparently in order to divorce him from his wife who is living in the United States of America. Amnesty International has just learned that on 29 October 1996, a Shari'a court in al-'Ain in Abu Dhabi reportedly ruled that the marriage was null and void. On this basis their marital relationship was considered immoral and he was sentenced to 39 lashes and one year's imprisonment. If this is the sole reason behind the Elie Dib Ghalib's punishment, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

Elie Dib Ghalib was allegedly beaten and flogged many times during his pre-trial detention and interrogation in al-'Ain police station apparently in order to force him to sign a confession. He is currently held in al-'Ain Central Prison where the sentence is likely to be carried out.

In April 1996 Amnesty International wrote to the UAE authorities expressing concern that Elie Dib Ghalib was being detained on the ground of his marriage as a Christian to a Muslim woman and seeking clarification of this. To date, no response has been received.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Elie Dib Ghalib has been working in the UAE, where he met Mona, since 1988. In June 1995 he married Mona in Lebanon. Subsequently, Elie Dib Ghalib went back to his work in the UAE, while Mona returned to the USA to continue her university studies. When the UAE authorities found out about his marriage they arrested him at the hotel where he works.

Under Shari'a (Islamic) law, in force in the UAE, a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man unless he converts to Islam. Such marriage under Shari'a is considered null and void, and the parties may be subject to punishment such as imprisonment or flogging.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Arabic, English or your own language:

- opposing the use of flogging as a judicial punishment in all cases as a violation of the right not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and urging that the sentence of flogging against Elie Dib Ghalib not be carried out;

- calling for his immediate and unconditional release if, as appears to be the case, he has been imprisoned solely because of his marriage, as a Christian, to a Muslim woman;
- calling for an immediate investigation into allegations that he was tortured in pre-trial detention, and for anyone found responsible for abuses to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

His Highness
al-Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahyan
President of the United Arab Emirates
Ruler of Abu Dhabi
Manhal Palace
PO Box 280, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
Telexes: 22220 PALACE EM
Telegrams: President Al-Nahyan, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Salutation: Your Highness

His Highness
Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al-Maktoum
Crown Prince
Ruler of Dubai
PO Box 899, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
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Telegrams: Crown Prince, Abu Dhabi, UAE
Salutation: Your Highness

His Excellency
General Dr Mohammad Saeed al-Badi
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COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of UAE accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.