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Saudi Arabia and Yemen: Commute death sentences this Ramadan

*“Don’t leave me to face agony and death,
As I await my name being called
When I, my executioner, and the sword meet
I think of this day every day
I can not eliminate it from my thoughts
I feel my throat, my neck and picture my execution as my head roll down”*

The exact number of people under sentence of death and awaiting execution in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen is believed to amount to several hundred. Such prisoners are exposed daily to severe mental stress due to the constant threat of execution and other factors, such as being kept in isolation as death row prisoners with no access to the outside world, and a lack of access to adequate legal representation.

Many death row prisoners are believed to have been convicted on the basis of “confessions” which they allege were obtained from them under duress and while they were being denied access to legal advice. Death row prisoners also include many foreign nationals who are unable to understand or communicate adequately in Arabic and who were reportedly convicted in trials whose proceedings they could not, therefore understand.

In Saudi Arabia many prisoners are unaware of the legal process from the moment of arrest to the final appeal. A foreign prisoner in Saudi Arabia wrote in a letter to her family, *“I don’t think I can take it any more...I think I can breathe more easily if I have news that they are even taking care of my case. I don’t even have anyone I can talk to who can help me...”*

Another prisoner in Saudi Arabia explained to Amnesty International upon release the fear faced by a fellow prisoner accused of murder, *“Every time a guard opens her cell door she gets very scared [that] they will come to take her for execution”*.

Samira, also known as the Khamis Musheet girl, a young woman sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia, recently wrote a poem from her cell in which she expressed her feelings while awaiting execution:

The relatives of those facing execution also suffer. The son of Fuad al Shahari, a Yemeni national who was executed in Taiz in November 2005, fainted upon hearing the sound of the bullet fired that ended his father’s life and subsequently had to be hospitalised. Fuad al Shahari was sentenced to death for murder in 1996 after a grossly unfair trial. Amnesty International had campaigned against his execution.

In previous years, heads of state in both Saudi Arabia and Yemen have marked the Islamic holy month of Ramadan (beginning around 23 September 2006 and ending with the *Eid-al-Fitr* celebrations on or around 21 or 22 October 2006) by extending clemency to prisoners under sentence of death by granting pardons or commuting their sentences.

Amnesty International is hopeful that these rulers may again mark the Islamic holy month of Ramadan in this way.

Please send appeals to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and/or President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh of Yemen to commute the death sentences against all those awaiting execution in their countries including the below named individuals.

Saudi Arabia

Suliamon Olyfemi, a Nigerian national aged around 28, was reportedly sentenced to death in May 2005 in connection with murder. During the trial, he reportedly had no access to legal representation or consular assistance. He was sentenced during a closed trial without adequate translation. When initially arrested he was allegedly tortured in an attempt to force him to confess to the murder.

Sit Zainab Binti Duhri Rupa, an Indonesian national and mother of two, has been detained in Medina Prison since 1999. She was arrested in connection with the murder of her employer in September 1999. She is reportedly psychologically ill and is said to have "confessed" to the murder during police interrogation. AI has raised concerns with the authorities about the confession in view of her psychological state and draws their attention to UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR) resolution 2004/67 of 21 April 2004, para. 4(c) which urges states that still maintain the death penalty “Not to impose the death penalty on a person suffering from any form of mental disorder or to execute any such person”.

Samira, also known as the Khamis Musheet girl, a Saudi Arabian national and married mother, was reportedly scheduled to be executed in July 2005 in connection with murder. The execution did not take place and she has since remained on death row. According to reports last year, she had become isolated, extremely depressed and her physical condition had deteriorated. Shortly after July 2005, negotiations were said to have begun with the family of the victim in attempt to seek a pardon. Samira was reportedly arrested in 1999 in connection with the murder of a man who allegedly tried to blackmail her in an attempt to force her to have sex with him.

How can you help?

Write to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia calling on him to exercise his powers during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan to commute the death sentences of all those on death row in Saudi Arabia, including the above-named individuals, as a matter of urgency with a view towards abolition.

King Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz Al-Saud
The Custodian of the two Holy Mosques
Office of His Majesty The King
Royal Court
Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Telegram: H.M. King Abdullah, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Salutation: Your Majesty

Yemen

Adil Muhammad Saif al-Ma’amari, a Yemeni national aged 21, was sentenced to death for a murder committed when he was 16 years old. He was arrested on 27 July 2001 and reportedly confessed under torture to murdering a male relative during an argument. During the Lower Court proceedings and upon the orders of a judge, he was examined by a doctor who reported that he was aged sixteen at the time of his arrest. He was sentenced to death in October 2002. The sentence was upheld by the Court of Appeal in May 2005 and the Supreme Court on February 2006.

Hafez Ibrahim, a Yemeni national, was scheduled to be executed in April 2005 for a murder he allegedly committed when he was a minor. However, following a personal appeal by the Minister of Human Rights in Yemen the President stayed the execution until further investigation into his age. The outcome of the investigation is not yet known. He was sentenced to death in October 2003. The sentence was upheld by the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. He is detained in Taiz Central Prison.

How can you help?

Please write to President ‘Ali’Abdullah Saleh calling on him to exercise his powers during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan to commute the death sentences of all those on death row in Yemen, including the above-named individuals, as a matter of urgency with a view towards abolition;

President ‘Ali’Abdullah Saleh
President of the Republic of Yemen
Sanaa
Republic of Yemen
Fax: + 967 127 4147
Salutation: Your Excellency

Please make sure that your letters and faxes reach King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and President ‘Ali’Abdullah Saleh as soon as possible to make certain that the cases come to their attention during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan which is due to begin on or around 23 September 2006 until 21 or 22 October 2006.