



Press Release

Death Penalty / Saudi Arabia

Four Syrian beheaded, hundreds still under the threat of execution in Saudi Arabia

Copenhagen, Damascus, Geneva, Paris – 2 May 2008

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), the Euro-Mediterranean Human rights Network, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the Committees for the Defence of Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms in Syria (CDF) express their deepest concern following the execution by decapitation of Feras Al Aghbar and Feras Al Maktabi, two Syrian nationals, executed on 17 April 2008 in Tabuk prison for crimes related to illicit drugs. Mohamed Awad Al Khalidi, a Jordanian citizen of Syrian origin, was beheaded also on 17 April 2008 in Qaryat prison and Ibrahim Hussein El Garakh on 27 April 2008 in Tabuk prison, apparently for similar crimes. According to the information received, more than 2000 Syrian prisoners, including children, are currently detained in Saudi Arabia, among which 200 awaiting execution for involvement in the sale of illicit drugs.

In 2007, Saudi Arabia executed at least 158 people, including three women, and children. Since January 2008 the figure has already reached 53. According to the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty, almost half of the executions in Saudi Arabia involve foreigners (76 out of 158 people executed in 2007). The World Coalition, Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT-France) and Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM) launched a campaign 'Saudi Arabia: why are foreigners losing their heads?' to condemn the increasing number of executions in Saudi Arabia since the beginning of the year 2008.

Executions in Saudi Arabia generally take the form of public decapitation. Foreign nationals are often more exposed to miscarriages of justice and unfair trials than nationals. As a result of their origins, they have little chance of escaping capital punishment. Prisoners are usually sentenced to death after receiving insufficient, sometimes even inexistent, legal representation and consular assistance.

Our organisations are strongly opposed to the death penalty. We recall that it is contrary to the very notions of human dignity and liberty. Furthermore, the death penalty has been proved to be entirely ineffective as a deterrent.

In view of today's international trend towards the abolition of the death penalty, our organisations call on the Saudi government to cease all executions to the death penalty and adopt an immediate moratorium on executions in accordance with the UN General Assembly's adoption on 18 December 2007 of a resolution calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions; to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two optional protocols, and to improve the conditions of detention of prisoners in accordance with the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Our organisations also wish to express concern on the conditions of detention inflicted to those sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia and urge Saudi Government to quickly take the necessary steps to address said conditions.

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