

# URGENT ACTION

## DEATH SENTENCE UPHELD ON APPEAL FOR 15 MEN

The families of 15 Saudi Arabian men sentenced to death learned on 23 July that the Court of Appeal had upheld their sentences. The 15 men are accused of spying for Iran and were sentenced after a grossly unfair mass trial. They will be at risk of imminent execution as soon as the Supreme Court upholds their sentences.

Salem al-Amri, Muhammad Attieh, Abbas al-Hassan, Muhammad al-Aashur, Taleb al-Harbi, Hussain al-Hamidi, Hussain al-Abbud, Taher al-Harbi, Ali al-Aashur, Yussuf al-Harbi, Ali al-Mahna', Ahmad al-Nasser, Abdullah al-Khamiss, Hussain al-Ibrahim and Abbas al-Ibad have had their death sentences upheld by the Court of Appeal of the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC). The families only learned that their relatives' sentences had been upheld when some of them checked with the SCC's Court of Appeal for updates on 23 July and were told by a court official that the case had been sent to the Supreme Court for review on 20 July.

The 15 Saudi Arabian men were sentenced to death on 6 December 2016 after a mass unfair trial of 32 people arrested across Saudi Arabia in 2013 and 2014. They were accused of spying for Iran. Fifteen others were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to 25 years and two were acquitted. The men were charged with a series of offences including "high treason" with some facing several other charges which are not recognisably criminal offences under international law such as "supporting protests" and "spreading the Shi'a faith".

According to the lawyer of most of the defendants, all 32 men arrested were detained without an arrest warrant and held incommunicado for almost three months. During that period, they were repeatedly interrogated without a lawyer. In many cases, they only discovered the reason for their arrest during their interrogations. Some of the men told the SCC that they were threatened with solitary confinement and that they would be banned from having any contact with their families if they did not sign "confession" documents. They said they were told that if they refused to sign these "confessions" that their families would be imprisoned and locked in cells next to them.

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to the Saudi Arabian judicial system, when a death sentence is imposed by a lower court, it should be first upheld by an appeal court before being automatically sent to the Supreme Court, where the verdict becomes final after being upheld. The case will then be sent to the King for ratification rendering the execution imminent. In practice, the Supreme Court's role is to check the formalities of the procedures in lower courts and not to review case details per se unless they relate to misapplied regulations by lower court judges. Usually, all these steps are taken without thoroughly informing the defendants, their lawyers and their families. The Saudi Arabian authorities, routinely fail to inform families of the imminent execution of a family member, and they also do not directly inform them of executions after they have been carried out.

Since 2013, Amnesty International has recorded a spike in the use of death sentences against political dissidents in Saudi Arabia, including the Shi'a Muslim minority. On 2 January 2016, Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr was executed along with 46 other prisoners. On 11 July 2017, Yussuf Ali al-Mushaikass, a father of two, was executed along with three other Shi'a men, for terror-related offences in connection with their participation in anti-government protests in the Eastern Province. His family was not informed of the execution in advance, only finding out about it afterwards when they saw a government statement read on TV. See Amnesty International's Urgent Action: Saudi Arabian man executed, 18 July 2017: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/6748/2017/en/>

Amnesty International has documented other the cases of at least 19 other Shi'a men currently sentenced to death. All were accused of activities deemed a risk to national security and handed death sentences by the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), a notorious counter-terror tribunal. Fourteen of them, who remain on death row and are at imminent risk of execution, were sentenced to death by the Specialized Criminal Court on 1 June 2016 after a mass unfair trial of 24 Saudi Arabian Shi'a Muslims which relied on "confessions" extracted through torture. They were convicted of a series of offences including among other things, taking part in violent protests in the Eastern Provinces in 2012. On 23 July, the families of the 14 men learned that the Supreme Court had upheld the death sentences of their relatives meaning that they could be executed as soon as the King ratifies the sentences. See Amnesty International's Urgent Action: 14 Saudi Arabia men at imminent risk of execution, 24 July 2017: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/6783/2017/en/>

Amongst those on death row and awaiting execution, there are also four Saudi Arabian men who were arrested for offences committed when they were under 18. They have said that they were tortured to make them "confess". One of these three is Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr's nephew. See Amnesty International's Urgent Action: Death penalty for juvenile activist, 3 June 2014: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/014/2014/en/> and Juvenile offenders risk execution, 15 October 2015: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde23/2671/2015/en/>

The death penalty is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty at all times, regardless of who is accused, the crime, their guilt or innocence or the method of execution. Saudi Arabia is one of the top executioners in the world, with more than 2,000 people executed between 1985 and 2016.

Names: Salem al-Amri, Muhammad Attieh, Abbas al-Hassan, Muhammad al-Aashur, Taleb al-Harbi, Hussain al-Hamidi, Hussain al-Abbud, Taher al-Harbi, Ali al-Aashur, Yussuf al-Harbi, Ali al-Mahna', Ahmad al-Nasser, Abdullah al-Khamiss, Hussain al-Ibrahim and Abbas al-Ibad  
Gender m/f: All males