



BRIEFING DOCUMENT METHODS OF EXECUTION IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Reprieve is a London-based legal action charity which provides assistance to people facing the death penalty around the world. Reprieve has been working on the cases of three juveniles - Ali al-Nimr, Dawood al-Marhoon and Abdullah al-Zaher - facing imminent execution in the Kingdom for their participation in pro-reform protests.

This briefing document outlines the three methods of execution in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

1. Execution by beheading or crucifixion ;
2. Execution by firing squad;
3. Execution by stoning.

Following the conclusion of all appeals, including requests for clemency, the King will order an execution by issuing a Royal Decree. The execution is carried out by the Ministry of Interior, who oversees the administration of prisons. The Ruler of the governorate will have final approval on which method of execution will be used. Executions are either performed in public spaces or within the prison. Notification of an execution to the prisoner and their families is uncommon. A public notice of an execution is issued by the Ministry of Interior after the execution is carried out.

Execution by Beheading or Crucifixion

Beheading with a sword is the predominant form of execution in Saudi Arabia. Islamic doctrine dictates executions be swift and painless, one quick motion to the back of the neck severing the head from the body. There have been documented cases where the executioners do not follow proper doctrine, requiring multiple blows to sever the head. Beheadings are implemented by a *sayyaf* or swordsman, a trained individual who specialises in the use of a sword in implementing punishment, ranging from beheadings to the amputation of limbs for other minor crimes.

Crucifixion is a rarely applied punishment; it entails the beheading of the prisoner, followed by a public display of the body for a certain period of time. Reprieve is not immediately aware of how this period of time is determined.

Execution by Firing squad

Where a trained swordsman is not available to carry out an execution, an execution may be carried out by firing squad. Little is known about this form of execution in the Kingdom, and it would appear that the authorities have hired more swordsmen in the last year in order to avoid execution by firing squad.

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Chair: Ken Macdonald QC

Patrons: Alan Bennett, Julie Christie, Martha Lane Fox, Paul Hamann, Gordon Roddick, Richard Rogers, Ruth Rogers, Jon Snow, Marina Warner and Vivienne Westwood

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Execution by Stoning

Stoning as a punishment in Saudi Arabia is reserved for those who have been charged with adultery. The perpetrator would be buried up to their chest or knees, people would throw stones until the condemned is confirmed dead. Though it is a legal form of punishment in Saudi Arabia, Reprieve is not aware of any recent executions by stoning.

Return of the body

It is unclear if the body of the prisoners executed must be returned to the family within a certain period of time. In a number of cases involving foreign nationals, Saudi authorities have refused or delayed the repatriation of the body; in other cases involving political protesters, the Saudi government has neither informed the family of the place of burial or indicated that they would be returning the body.

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