

Saudi Arabia: Imprisonment and Whipping of 75 year-old Woman

Thursday 3 September 2009, by [MICHAEL Maggie](#), [WLUML](#) (Date first published: 2 September 2009).

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UPDATE: Saudi Arabia: Court ratifies guilty verdict on 75 year old women

2/09/2009: On 25 August the court of Al-Shamli, north of Hail, found Mrs Khamisa Sawadi guilty of the charge of “khilwa” (mingling with two young men to whom she was not immediately related), and the higher court in Riyadh ratified their verdict. One of the two young men who was tried alongside Sawadi may face additional charges for filing a law suit against the religious police. This is in spite of the fact that in May the Court of Cassation refused to ratify the verdict and returned the case to Al-Shamli court with several observations on the previous verdict, including the rejection of her breastfeeding claim and the fact that she is old.

Khamisa Sawadi had been sentenced to 4 months in prison and 40 lashes and will be deported and forbidden from entering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia again. One male defendant has been sentenced to 6 months in prison and 60 lashes. The court rejected the defendant's explanation that one of the male defendants was her son because she breastfed him when he was a baby. The court also accused the defendants of attacking the 'Committee for the promotion of virtue and prevention of vice', and for insulting them.

In April 2008 Sawadi met the two 24-year-old men after she asked them to bring her five loaves of bread. The two men, Al-Anzi, Sawadi's late husband's nephew, and bin Zein, al-Anzi's business partner, were also arrested by religious police and found guilty and sentenced to prison terms and lashes. The court based its decision on 'citizen information' and testimony for al-Anzi's father, who accused Sawadi of corruption. Furthermore, the verdict cited the fact that Sawadi is not a Saudi national - although she was married to a Saudi man - and that she was without a husband as evidence of her guilt. Following the implementation of her sentence, Sawadi will face deportation.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please send this letter to the relevant authorities in Saudi Arabia:

Subject: Imprisonment and Whipping of 75 year-old Woman

[date]

[Your Excellency/ Dear Sir/ Your Highness],

The Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) international solidarity network is deeply

concerned by the conviction of Mrs. Khamisa Sawadi for 'illegal mingling', and to hear that her sentencing to forty lashes and four months in prison has been ratified by the higher court in Riyadh. The verdict raises questions not just related to the safety and security of Mrs. Sawadi, but also the broader situation of human/women's rights in Saudi Arabia.

On March 3, 2009 Mrs. Sawadi, a 75 year old woman living in Hail, northern Saudi Arabia, was accused, and found guilty, of mingling with two young men to whom she was not immediately related. In April 2008 Sawadi met the two 24-year-old men after she asked them to bring her five loaves of bread. Since her husband's death and the marriage of her two daughters, who subsequently relocated to Riyadh, Sawadi had commonly asked her friends and neighbours for help. The two men, Al-Anzi, Sawadi's late husband's nephew, and bin Zein, al-Anzi's business partner, were also arrested by religious police and found guilty and sentenced to prison terms and lashes.

The court based its decision on 'citizen information' and testimony from al-Anzi's father, who accused Sawadi of corruption. Furthermore, the verdict cited the fact that Sawadi is not a Saudi national - although she was married to a Saudi man - and that she was without a husband as evidence of her guilt. Following the implementation of her sentence, Sawadi will face deportation.

As Saudi Arabia has committed itself to upholding human rights, evidenced by its candidacy to the Human Rights Council 2006, ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 2000, and claims to be dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights, we ask that the Saudi authority fulfil its obligation and correct this breach of international law. In its own letter to the UN Secretary General in 2006 Saudi Arabia claimed to have "a confirmed commitment with the defence, protection and promotion of human rights. This commitment has been manifested in its performance as a member of the Commission on Human Rights. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia pursues the policy of active cooperation with international organizations in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms." Even under the strict Sharia laws of Saudi Arabia, Khamisa did not commit any violation. A woman who has passed menopause is exempt from mingling and veiling restrictions by the words of Quran as a woman of 'qawa'id'.

We demand that Saudi Arabia demonstrate its commitment to human rights and release Khamisa Sawadi, Fahd al-Anzi, and Hadiyan bin Zein and revoke the order of deportation.

Yours Sincerely,

[your name/organisation]

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Saudi embassy in your country: <http://www.embassiesabroad.com/embassies-of/SaudiArabia>

Please continue to check for address updates...

BACKGROUND

Article in Arabic, announcing verdict: <http://www.elaph.com/Web/ElaphGulf/2009/8/475464.htm>

Update on: Saudi Arabia: Imprisonment and Whipping of 75 year-old Woman:
[http://wluml.org/english/actionsupdates.shtml?cmd\[136\]=i-136-34117db0605eb1cc770b1383f5d517fe](http://wluml.org/english/actionsupdates.shtml?cmd[136]=i-136-34117db0605eb1cc770b1383f5d517fe)

also see below.

Saudi Arabia: Court sentences 75-year-old woman to lashes

10/03/2009: Khamisa Sawadi, who is Syrian but was married to a Saudi, was convicted and sentenced last week for meeting with men who were not her immediate relatives. (AP)

The sentencing of a 75-year-old widow to 40 lashes and four months in prison for mingling with two young men who were reportedly bringing her bread has sparked new criticism of Saudi Arabia's ultraconservative religious police and judiciary. The two men, including one who was Sawadi's late husband's nephew, were also found guilty and sentenced to prison terms and lashes.

The woman's lawyer, Abdel Rahman al-Lahem, told The Associated Press on Monday that he plans to appeal the verdict, which also demands that Sawadi be deported after serving her prison term. He declined to provide more details and said his client, who is not serving her sentence yet, was not speaking with the media.

Saudi Arabia's strict interpretation of Islam prohibits men and women who are not immediate relatives from mingling and women from driving. The playing of music, dancing and many movies also are a concern for hard-liners who believe they violate religious and moral values.

A special police unit called the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice enforces these laws, patrolling public places to make sure women are covered and not wearing make up, sexes don't mix, shops close five times a day for Muslim prayers and men go to the mosque to worship.

But criticism of the religious police and judiciary has been growing in Saudi, where many say they exploit their broad mandate to interfere in people's lives.

Last month, the Saudi king dismissed the chief of the religious police and a cleric who condoned killing of TV network owners that broadcast "immoral content" — as part of a shake-up signaling an effort to weaken the kingdom's hard-line Sunni Muslim establishment.

In Sawadi's case, the elderly woman met the two 24-year-old men last April after she asked them to bring her five loaves of bread, the Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan* reported.

The men — identified by *Al-Watan* as the nephew, Fahd al-Anzi, and his friend and business partner Hadiyan bin Zein — went to Sawadi's home in the city of al-Chamil, located north of the Saudi capital, Riyadh. After delivering the bread, the two men were arrested by a one of the religious police, *Al-Watan* reported.

The court said it based its March 3 ruling on "citizen information" and testimony from al-Anzi's father, who accused Sawadi of corruption.

"Because she said she doesn't have a husband and because she is not a Saudi, conviction of the defendants of illegal mingling has been confirmed," the court verdict read.

Sawadi had told the court that she considered al-Anzi is her son, because she breast-fed him when he was a baby. But the court denied her claim, saying she didn't provide evidence. In Islamic tradition, breast-feeding establishes a degree of maternal relation, even if a woman nurses a child who is not biologically hers.

Sawadi commonly asked her neighbors for help after her husband died, said Saudi journalist Bandar al-Ammar, who reported the story for *Al-Watan*. In a recent article, he wrote that he felt the need to report the case "so everybody knows to what degree we have reached."

Others have also spoken out against the case against Sawadi, accusing the religious police of going too far.

"How can a verdict be issued based on suspicion?" Saudi doctor and columnist Laila Ahmed al-

Ahdab wrote in *Al-Watan* on Monday. "A group of people are misusing religion to serve their own interests."

09 March 2009

By Maggie Michael

Source: The Associated Press
