

Two Convicts Beheaded in Saudi Arabia Take 2015 Tally to 100



Riyadh, June 16 (RHC)-- A Syrian national convicted of drug trafficking and a citizen found guilty of homicide have been beheaded in Saudi Arabia, bringing to 100 the number of such executions in the oil-rich country since the beginning of this year.

The Syrian man, identified as Ismael al-Tawm, smuggled "a large amount of banned amphetamine pills into the kingdom" and was decapitated in the northern region of Jawf on Monday, said the Saudi Interior Ministry in a statement carried by the official Saudi Press Agency. A separate statement said Saudi national Rami al-Khaldi was executed in the western province of Taef, after being convicted of stabbing another Saudi to death.

Amnesty International has described Saudi Arabia's use of death penalty as unprecedented, and said the toll is "one of the highest recorded by the organization during the same period for more than three decades."

The London-based watchdog said on May 28th that almost half of the executions carried out so far this year were for drug-related offenses, and about half of those put to death have been foreigners. "These do not fall into the category of 'most serious crimes,' and the use of the death penalty for such offenses violates international law," it said.

The United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions had earlier expressed concern about a surge in the number of executions carried out in Saudi Arabia. "It is certainly very disturbing that there is such a fast pace of executions at the moment," Christof Heyns said on May 27th.

In Saudi Arabia, rape, murder, apostasy, armed robbery and drug trafficking all carry the death penalty. Beheadings are carried out in public using a sword. Muslim scholars and clerics have on occasions criticized Saudi authorities for indicting and then executing suspects without giving them a chance to defend themselves.

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