

Amnesty International Says Saudi Arabia Breaks 20-year Execution Record

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INTERNATIONAL**



London, November 23 (RHC)-- At least 151 people have been executed in Saudi Arabia so far this year, the highest figure in the last 20 years, Amnesty International says. In a statement, the rights group said Saudi authorities, on average, have put to death one person every other day so far this year.

The number shows a dramatic 68-percent rise in comparison with 90 executions carried out over the whole of the last year. The last time Riyadh executed over 150 people in a single year was in 1995, when 192 executions were recorded, according to the statement.

"The Saudi Arabian authorities appear intent on continuing a bloody execution spree which has seen at least 151 people put to death so far this year," said James Lynch, Amnesty International's deputy director for the Middle East and North Africa Program.

The statement also noted that nearly half of this year's executions were for offenses that do not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes" for which the death penalty can be given under international human rights law. "Under international human rights standards, most serious crimes are crimes that involve intentional killing."

Under the Saudi law, apostasy, armed robbery, drug trafficking, rape and murder carry the death penalty. Most Saudi executions are carried out by beheading with a sword. According to Amnesty, 71 foreign nationals were among those executed in Saudi Arabia this year.

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