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Saudi Arabia: Amnesty International calls for end to arrests and expulsions of foreign migrant workers on discriminatory grounds

Amnesty International is calling on the Saudi Arabian government to halt expulsions of foreign migrant workers on account of their religious beliefs and affiliations.

The organization made this call after at least 14 foreign nationals, all migrant workers and members of their families from different countries, were expelled from Saudi Arabia during the past week. The workers, most of whom had been employed in Saudi Arabia for years, were all ordered to leave the country apparently because of their actual or suspected connection with the Ahmadiyya Community, a religious community which considers itself a sect of Islam. None are known to have been charged with any criminal offences, let alone tried and convicted.

At least 40 other foreign workers and their families are reported to be under imminent threat of expulsion on the same grounds, including two who are currently held at the Deportation Centre in Jeddah and are scheduled to be flown out of Saudi Arabia before this evening. Mahmud Korumban, a printing technician, and Sulayman Ahmad, a driver, are both expected to be expelled to India, their home country, although they have been legally employed in Saudi Arabia for at least eight and ten years respectively.

According to information received by Amnesty International, some 55 foreign nationals, all migrant workers and their families, were arrested on 29 December 2006 at a place of worship in Jeddah by members of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), otherwise known as the *Mutawwween* or religious police. They were then handed over to the civil police in Jeddah for detention. Almost two weeks later, 35 of them, including women and children, were released on 10 January 2007 when their employers, who act as their "sponsors" (*kafeel*) and who had been summoned to collect them by the authorities, arrived at their places of detention to do so. Upon being released, they were reportedly informed that they would be required to leave Saudi Arabia as soon as their sponsors had completed the necessary travel arrangements. They appear to have been allowed no opportunity to challenge the decision to expel them or the grounds for their expulsion.

Amnesty International has appealed to Saudi Arabian Interior Minister Prince Naif bin 'Abdul 'Aziz to intervene and ensure both that all those detained solely on account of their actual or suspected connection with the Ahmadiyya religious community are released immediately and unconditionally and to halt expulsions of foreign migrant workers on such discriminatory grounds.

The expulsion of the 14 individuals on the basis of their actual or suspected membership of the Ahmadiyya religious community is a violation of the norm of non-discrimination, a customary norm of international law binding on all states that prohibits among others any form of discrimination on the basis

of religious affiliation.

Amnesty International reiterates its appeal to the Saudi Arabian authorities to halt the expulsion of all those targeted solely for their actual or suspected connection with the Ahmadiyya religious community and to ensure that any expulsion of migrant workers is done in accordance with procedural safeguards including: the ability to challenge individually the decision to expel, access to competent interpretation services and legal counsel, and access to a review, ideally a judicial review, of a negative decision.

Prior to its election to the new UN Human Rights Council in May 2006, the Saudi Arabian government pledged to pursue a policy of active cooperation with international organizations in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.