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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE CAPITAL SENTENCE IMPOSED ON SARAH BALABAGAN, A FILIPINO MAID

Amnesty International remains concerned about the death sentence imposed on Sarah Balabagan, a Filipino worker, on 16 September 1995 by a court in Al-Ain in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

An appeal court in Al-Ain today postponed the hearing of the first appeal against the death sentence verdict by the court of first instance until 30 October 1995. The postponement was reportedly requested by defence lawyers in order to allow them more time to study the case and provide new evidence.

This is the first stage of the case's appeal process. The parties concerned will have the opportunity to lodge another appeal before the Supreme Federal Court of Cassation within a month of the date of the appeal court's decision. If the death sentence is upheld by both courts of appeal it will have to be ratified by the President of the UAE before it becomes final and execution imminent.

Sarah Balabagan was found guilty of premeditated murder against her employer, Almas Mohammed al-Baloushi. She stated during her trial that she stabbed him to death because he raped her. Her defence lawyer argued for her acquittal on the basis of self defence, but the court found her guilty as charged and sentenced her to death.

During a previous trial on the same charge, which was concluded on 26 June 1995, a different court ruled that she was both guilty of manslaughter and a victim of rape. It accordingly sentenced her to seven years' imprisonment and ordered her to pay 150,000 dirhams (\$40,000) blood money to relatives of the deceased. In addition, the court awarded her 100,000 dirhams (\$27,000) compensation for rape.

This verdict was open to appeal before the appeal court in al-Ain and subsequently before the Supreme Federal Court of Cassation in Abu Dhabi. However, the President of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahayan, reportedly ordered a retrial of the case before the appeal took place. Amnesty International does not know the exact reasons for the retrial order by the President.

Amnesty International has sent early appeals to the UAE President urging him to exercise clemency and commute this punishment should it be upheld by the appeal courts. The organization is closely monitoring the case and will take appropriate action, as it does in death penalty cases anywhere in the world, to urge the UAE government to prevent the execution of Sarah Balabagan.

Amnesty International is also seeking information regarding conflicting accounts of Sarah Balabagan's age at the time of the sentencing.

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