

# URGENT ACTION

## US NATIONAL SENTENCED TO DEATH IN SAUDI ARABIA

**US national Robert Slaten was sentenced to death on 13 July in Saudi Arabia on appeal. A court convicted him of the murder of his wife after a grossly unfair trial. The conviction relied largely on statements made by the victim's son, who did not witness the crime.**

**Robert Paul Slaten**, a 61-year-old US citizen and father-of-two, was sentenced to death by the General Court in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's capital, on 13 July for the murder of his wife, a Sri Lankan national. The court had found in 2015 that there was insufficient evidence to convict him of "intentional and aggressive murder", but the judges used their discretion under Shari'a law to sentence him to five years in prison. His sentence was later increased to death after an appeal process involving both the General Court and the Court of Appeal in Riyadh.

According to trial documents, the General Court had concluded that there was insufficient evidence to prove that Robert Slaten was guilty of murder. However, it then convicted him of the crime by relying on statements made by the victim's son, who swore 50 times in court that he believed Robert Slaten was responsible for the murder of his mother even though he was not present at the crime scene and provided no substantive information to support his belief. The procedure follows a Shari'a law provision that allows a court to rely on a male heir of the victim expressing at least 50 times under oath his belief that the accused is the perpetrator. Trial records show that at first the victim's son refused to make these sworn statements but was eventually persuaded to do so by the judges.

Robert Slaten was arrested during the evening of 2 April 2011, outside his home in the residential compound of Saudi Aramco in the eastern city of Dhahran. According to his family, he was detained incommunicado in solitary confinement for the first two months of his detention. During this time, he was repeatedly interrogated without a lawyer. He claims that during one interrogation he was made to stand in front of a picture of swords and threatened with execution. During others, he was told that he would be allowed to call anyone he liked if he would only "confess" to murder. Robert Slaten had virtually no legal representation throughout his trial. His lawyer only attended a few court sessions at the start of his trial, while US embassy representatives were not present in any of the sessions. He maintains his innocence and has appealed the latest decision, again before the Court of Appeal.

### **Please write immediately in English, Arabic or your own language:**

- Calling on the Saudi Arabian authorities to quash the conviction of Robert Slaten, and order a retrial with proceedings that fully comply with international fair trial standards and without recourse to the death penalty;
- Urging them to ensure that he is granted prompt and regular access to his family and receives effective legal representation;
- Reminding the authorities that international safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty require that this punishment be imposed only when the guilt of the person charged is based upon clear and convincing evidence, leaving no room for an alternative explanation of the facts.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 OCTOBER 2017 TO:**

Minister of Justice  
His Excellency Waleed bin Mohammad  
Al-Samaani  
Ministry of Justice  
University Street, Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Fax: +966 11 4055399  
+ 966 11 4020311  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
His Excellency Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Postal Code: 55937  
Riyadh 11544  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Fax: +966 11 412 2080  
Twitter: @KSAMOFa  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**And copies to:**  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, USA  
The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520  
Minister of Foreign Affairs, USA  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.** His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Nawaf bin Abdul Aziz - Ambassador of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques in London, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 30 Charles Street, Mayfair, London, W1J 5DZ tel: 020 7917 3000 or 02079173288, fax 02079173113 email: [ukemb@mofa.gov.sa](mailto:ukemb@mofa.gov.sa) complete the webform here:

<http://embassies.mofa.gov.sa/sites/uk/EN/ContactDiplomaticMission/Pages/ContactWithDiplomaticMission.aspx>; twitter: @SaudiEmbassyUK, Salutation: Your Royal Highness **Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.**

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Robert Slaten is from Arkansas, in the south-eastern region of the United States of America. He has worked in Saudi Arabia as a drilling foreman at Saudi Aramco, the Saudi Arabian Oil Company, in the eastern city of Dhahran since 2008.

According to court documents, Robert Slaten's case started before the General Court, a court of first instance, in Riyadh on 10 June 2012. On 27 April 2015, the court found that there was insufficient evidence to convict him of intentional murder under *qisas* (retribution punishment), which carries the death penalty. Instead, the judges used their discretion (under the Shari'a law principle of *ta'zir*, which allows the judge discretion to decide on the punishment) to sentence him to five years' imprisonment and 500 lashes. His sentence was appealed and on 19 October 2015 the Court of Appeal in Riyadh sent the case back to the General Court with comments, to which the General Court responded on 20 March 2016 by increasing the sentence to six years' imprisonment. The sentence was again appealed and sent back for a second time by the Appeal Court to the General Court, which further increased it on 12 June 2016 to seven years' imprisonment. In both appeals, the Appeal Court found that the evidence strongly indicated that Robert Slaten murdered his wife and asked the General Court whether the male heir of the victim would swear under oath that Robert Slaten was the perpetrator. The evidence cited in the trial documents to demonstrate Robert Slaten's responsibility for the killing included elements such as: "The confession by the defendant of having sharp family, moral and financial differences with his wife"; "the implicit confession when he cried and asked to call his brother in the US and the US Consul to ask for advice on confessing, but he came back and insisted that he denied [the killing]; and "the circumstances surrounding the body and where it was found".

In December 2016, Robert Slaten submitted a further appeal, and the Court of Appeal once again sent the case back to the General Court with additional comments. On 13 July 2017 he was taken back to the General Court in Riyadh and informed that his sentence had been increased to the death penalty.

The court judgement shows that in order to convict Robert Slaten of murder and increase the sentence to death, the General Court, as per the recommendation of the Appeal Court, relied on a Shari'a law provision that allowed it to give considerable weight to sworn statements of a male heir. The provision stipulates that, if the court suspects that the accused has killed the victim and there is demonstrated animosity between the two parties, it can rely on a male heir of the victim swearing under oath at least 50 times that he believes that the accused was the perpetrator. In this case, even though he was not present at the crime scene, the victim's son swore 50 times in court that he believed that Robert Slaten was responsible for the crime. When asked why he believed that Robert was the perpetrator, he told the court that he believed his mother told him that she was having "problems" with her husband. Records from the trial show that at first the victim's son refused to make these sworn statements, but was eventually persuaded by the judges to exercise this right.

Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most prolific executioners and has put to death more than 400 people since the beginning of 2014, mostly for murder, drug-related crimes, and terrorism-related offences. As of today, 105 countries have fully abolished the death penalty and over two-thirds are abolitionist in law or practice. Only 11 countries, including Saudi Arabia, are known to have carried out executions every year in the past five years.