

URGENT ACTION

STOP THE EXECUTION OF ESSAM AHMED

Essam Ahmed, an Egyptian fisherman, is at imminent risk of execution in Saudi Arabia. Saudi authorities arrested him in December 2021 from the sea between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Essam Ahmed said he was coerced by a man wielding a gun to transport drugs. In November 2022, the Criminal Court in Tabuk sentenced him to death after a grossly unfair trial for drug-related offences. Essam Ahmed said he was tortured immediately after his arrest and “confessed” under torture to drug trafficking. He had no lawyer throughout his arrest and investigation period. Essam Ahmed's conviction and death sentence must be immediately quashed and a fair retrial established, without resort to the death penalty.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

King Salman bin Abdul Aziz al Saud
Office of His Majesty the King
Royal Court, Riyadh
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Your Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud,

I am deeply distressed that Essam Ahmed, an Egyptian fisherman, is at imminent risk of execution and will be put to death unless you quash his conviction death sentence. Saudi authorities arrested Essam Ahmed in December 2021. He was in the sea somewhere between Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He said he was coerced by a man wielding a gun to carry a package by sea from Egypt. He said he dropped the package in the water and was intercepted by Saudi border guards while still in Egyptian waters.

According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, Essam Ahmed was charged with trafficking around 300,000 amphetamine pills, 270 grams of opium, 180 grams of heroin and consumption of prohibited pills and hashish. He was convicted and sentenced under Article 37 of the Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Control Law (1426 H). The judge imposed a death sentence on him, despite the discretion he had as ata'zir crime to choose another punishment. The use of the death penalty for drug-related offences violates international law and standards.

Essam Ahmed said he was taken to a detention centre on the Saudi shore after his arrest and beaten for three days. He eventually signed a “confession” that he had transported drugs and that he was arrested in Saudi waters. Essam Ahmed has been subjected to a grossly unfair trial. He told the judge that he was threatened at gunpoint in Egypt and that he had been coerced into carrying the package, but his claims were not included in his court documents or raised during the appeal process. His family said that he had no legal representation during his arrest nor investigation. Unfair proceedings render the use of the death penalty arbitrary.

I urge you not to ratify the death sentence of Essam Ahmed, and to call on the competent authorities to quash their convictions and order a fair retrial without recourse to the death penalty. Saudi Arabia must immediately establish an official moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to court documents analysed by Amnesty International, Essam Ahmed had no previous criminal record and was 25 years old when he was arrested. Essam Ahmed's family said that he had no legal representation during his arrest nor investigation. He was given a court-appointed lawyer when his trial began, but it was difficult to get responses from the lawyer and the lawyer did not promptly share the charges against Essam Ahmed or his court documents. The family said that the court-appointed lawyer did not inform them about the possibility of clemency, did not tell them the appeal had to be filed within a month, or that the Supreme Court would issue its ruling after four months.

A "confession" Essam Ahmed said was extracted under torture was included in his court documents, which stated: "He confessed to trafficking 334,000 pills of amphetamine pills ... and he stated that he transported the quantity from Nuweiba city [coastal town] through the sea, and that was after he connected with the financier and dropped him off near the Saudi maritime border, and he completed the route swimming until he was arrested".

During Essam Ahmed's appeals process, the family hired a lawyer privately, at great cost to themselves. According to court documents reviewed by Amnesty International, the lawyer told the judge that his client "is considered a victim of drug traffickers who have exploited his young age, poverty and financial need". The lawyer's claim of exploitation was not addressed by the judge also during the appeal process.

Essam Ahmed's account reflects several of the elements identified by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on trafficking: Essam Ahmed said that he was recruited under deceptive conditions; transported across maritime borders without full knowledge or informed consent to carry prohibited drugs; and, coerced under threat and forced into physical risk (swimming across a maritime border).

Between January 2014 and June 2025, Saudi Arabia executed 1,816 people, according to the official press agency. Nearly one in three were executed for drug-related offences. Out of the 597 people executed for drug-related offences during the ten-year period, foreign nationals made up nearly three-quarters (75%) of such executions. In 2024 Saudi Arabia carried out a record 345 executions. The 345 executions carried out in 2024 marked the highest number of executions Amnesty International has recorded in Saudi Arabia in over three decades.

Over the past five years, the Saudi authorities have repeatedly announced reforms to their use of the death penalty, including promising to limit executions for drug-related offences. The Saudi authorities have either backtracked or failed to implement reforms in line with international standards. In January 2021, as part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's wider package of criminal justice reforms, Saudi Arabia's Human Rights Commission (SHRC) announced a moratorium on drug-related executions which remained in place for 33 months between February 2020 and November 2022. In November 2022, the moratorium was abruptly lifted, followed by a spike in drug-related executions that same month.

International human rights treaties and standards exclude drug-related offences from the permissible scope of the death penalty. Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally, in all cases without exception, regardless of the nature or circumstances of the crime, the guilt, innocence or other characteristics of the person, or the method used by the state to carry out the execution. The organization has long held that the death penalty violates the right to life, as recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Arabic and English.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 7 December 2025.
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Essam Ahmed (he/him).

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

His Excellency Hrh Prince Khalid Bin Bandar Bin Sultan Al-Saud
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Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia
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Salutation: Your Excellency