Saudi Arabian monarchy calls for more executioners

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20 May 2015

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Civil Service posted eight job openings this week for new executioners on its employment website. The job posting states that no particular qualifications are necessary and that applicants will not be subject to typical civil service entrance exams.

The new state killers, who are formally classified as religious functionaries, will be responsible for "carrying out the death sentence according to Islamic Sharia after it is ordered by a legal ruling." They will also be responsible for amputating the hands of those individuals convicted of criminal offenses that do not carry the death penalty.

The most common form of state sanctioned murder in the Islamic kingdom is beheading with a scimitar, a traditional Arabian sword with a long curved blade. Executions have also been carried out by firing squad and stoning, though these methods of killing are less prevalent.

The Saudi monarchy is in desperate need for new swordsmen as the number of beheadings is on pace to double from last year. According to Human Rights Watch there have been 85 beheadings so far this year, nearly matching in less than five months the 90 beheadings carried out in all of 2014.

Approximately half of those beheaded last year were Saudi Arabian. The others were migrant workers from Yemen, Pakistan, Jordan, Syria, Sudan, Chad, Eritrea, India, Burma, Indonesia and the Philippines.

With their noted quiescence, American officials including President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry sanction Saudi Arabia's decapitations even as they hypocritically utilize the horrific images of beheadings by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria to justify military operations in Iraq and Syria.

Saudi Arabia has consistently been ranked as among the top five countries for executions annually. The kingdom ranked third in the number of executions in 2014, behind China and Iran, and ahead of Iraq and the United States. According to figures compiled by Amnesty International, Saudi Arabia put a total of 592 people to death between 2007 and 2014.

The number of executions has risen dramatically since King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud took the throne in January. Salman has appointed a number of new judges to work through a significant backlog of death penalty appeals.

Saudi Arabia is one of the last countries to officially sanction public executions and the only one to carry them out on a methodical basis. Beheadings are routinely carried out in broad daylight in public squares. Deera Square, the main site of public executions in the capital city, Riyadh, is grotesquely nicknamed Chop Chop Square.

Earlier this month five men who had been convicted of murder were beheaded in Jeddah and their corpses were hung by a rope from a helicopter hovering above the city in a grisly public display. Recent cases have also been reported in which decapitated corpses were crucified and left to hang in the open air.

Though it is illegal to film the killings, videos depicting the barbaric practice often leak online. A Saudi security official was arrested in January for filming and posting online the video of a typical execution. The video shows a woman protesting her innocence as she is forced to the ground by security officers, positioning her to be beheaded. The swordsman pulls back his scimitar and butchers the woman with three successive hacks at her neck.

While most beheadings are carried out in punishment for murder, the death penalty is also applicable under Saudi law in cases of adultery, apostasy, burglary, drug

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smuggling, sorcery, witchcraft, fornication, sodomy, homosexuality, lesbianism, carjacking and waging war on God.

A Sudanese migrant worker was beheaded in 2011 after being convicted of practicing witchcraft and sorcery. According to Amnesty International, Abdul Hamid bin Hussein Mostafa al Fakki was entrapped by an *agent provocateur* from Saudi Arabia's religious police, who asked him to cast a spell to reunite the police agent's supposedly divorced parents. The Ministry of Justice filed 191 capital cases of alleged sorcery between November 2013 and May 2014, many against migrant workers.

The barbarity of the Saudi monarchy is not confined to its own borders. The spike in public executions also comes as the Saudi monarchy, with the full support of the US, is leading a punishing air war against the Houthi in Yemen. Airstrikes since March have resulted in the deaths of more than 1,800 people, half of them civilians.

The Saudi-led coalition has committed numerous war crimes, deploying illegal cluster munitions and dropping bombs on a refugee camp, a warehouse full of humanitarian supplies and a dairy factory. Schools, hospitals, airports and residential neighborhoods have all been deliberately targeted for destruction.

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