

**Question for written answer E-001818/2012
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)**

Rule 117

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Subject: VP/HR - Unlawful arrest of 35 Ethiopian Christians in Saudi Arabia

Since 15 December 2011, the day of their arrest, 35 Ethiopian Christians have been awaiting trial on a charge of 'unlawful meeting of unmarried persons of the opposite sex'. On that day, police raided a private dwelling in Jeddah and arrested the Ethiopians, who had gathered there to pray. According to the report by Human Rights Watch, 29 of the 35 persons arrested were women, who were subjected to harassment and illegal body searches. The prisoners were then transferred to Buraiman prison, where the female prisoners were sexually assaulted and the male prisoners were beaten.

King Abdullah has established an international centre for inter-religious dialogue in Vienna, but his police continue to ride roughshod over the rights of believers of other faiths.

Saudi Arabia is a signatory to the Arab Charter on Human Rights, which guarantees the freedom to practise one's religion or to observe religious rites, either alone or communally with others, and prohibits 'unlawful arrests'.

According to Human Rights Watch, the papers of many of the persons arrested were in order.

The Saudi Government is committed to respecting worship by those of other faiths.

Although the Saudi Penal Code does not make provision for any laws outlawing freedom of assembly, cases of ill-treatment are continuing to occur, the case of these Ethiopians being just the latest example of torture and abuse.

In view of the above:

1. What actions have been taken in response to these events? Are there sufficient grounds to lodge a formal protest against the Saudi authorities in order to secure the immediate release of the 35 Ethiopian men and women?
2. What means can the High Representative employ to make the Saudi authorities investigate the alleged cases of physical and sexual abuse and, if necessary, compensate the victims and punish the officials responsible for these acts?
3. What actions has she taken to prevent any repetition of cases such as the one involving the 35 arrested Ethiopians?