

Saudis execute maid for infant's death



The home of Rizana Nafeek, executed yesterday in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabian authorities yesterday beheaded a Sri Lankan domestic worker convicted of the killing of an infant in her care.

Rizana Nafeek was sentenced to death in October 2010 after being found guilty in the death of the four-month-old infant of her Saudi employer in 2005.

She was 17 years old at the time of her employment, but she traveled to Saudi Arabia with forged identification papers that listed her age as 23.

The Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that Rizana Nafeek, who was imprisoned at Saudi Arabia's Dawad-mi Prison since 2005, was executed around 11:40 am local time yesterday.

Before her execution, Nafeek retracted a confession that she said was made under duress, and said the infant died from choking while feeding from a bottle.

Rafeena Nafeek, 40, mother of Rizana Nafeek, from Muttur, a town 280 kilometers from Colombo, had held out hope that her daughter would ultimately be exonerated, and said her daughter's death was a tragedy.

“We lived with so many difficulties with my two daughters and son, so Rizana went to Saudi Arabia with a dream to educate her siblings and give a good life to us,” Nafeek's mother told ucanews.com.

The Sri Lankan government, several human rights organizations, along with social aid group Caritas, the Catholic Bishops' Conference and other religious leaders all requested a stay of execution until a settlement could be reached in the case.

Mohamed Sally Jenufa, 41, a member of the Northeast Women's Action Network, condemned the execution.

“Not only Sri Lankan women but also women all over the world should raise their voices against this. The infant's death was an accident, but they took Nafeek's life as a punishment.”

She added: “The law should be amended to punish the illegal agents who send underage children to work as house maids. And the Sri Lankan government and Foreign Employment Bureau should take steps to prevent the hiring of unskilled house maids.”

The execution has also been criticized as a violation of international law, which prohibits capital punishment for crimes committed by someone under the age of 18.

A recruitment agency altered Nafeek's birth date on her passport to present her as 23 years of age, but her birth certificate shows she was 17 at the time of the incident.

The High Court in Sri Lanka has sentenced two recruitment agents to two years in prison for the falsification of Nafeek's travel documents.

Father Nandana Manatunga, a human rights activist who fought for Nafeek's release, said that the government has a big responsibility towards migrant people to have an effective monitoring mechanism on all job agencies to avoid discrepancies and bad practices such as sending underaged girls for employment in the Middle East.

UCA News