Children’s Rights in Saudi Arabia

All the children around the world should have the same rights, regardless of where they live or what their religion is. The United Nations wrote a covenant to save the rights of the children in the world. Almost every country in the world has committed to respect and protect these rights. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries that have committed to respect and protect its children’s rights, but does it really do what it has committed to do?

In 1989, the convention on the rights of the child became the first legally binding international convention to affirm human rights for all children by world leaders. The convention included fifty-four articles that described the basic human rights that should be enjoyed by children everywhere and without discrimination (www.unicef.org). Many countries signed the convention in 1990, but some did not. Saudi Arabia was one of the countries that did not sign the convention until the 26th of January 1996. However, by consent to be bound to the convention, the national governments had committed themselves to protecting and ensuring children’s rights. Although they made that commitment they did not follow this up with laws to actually protect children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Saudi Arabia ratified in 1996, prohibits the death penalty or life sentences without parole for offenses committed under the age of 18. In my opinion, the right to survive and to life means no one has the right to take one of those rights away no matter what the reason is. I consider that to be as one of the most important things that the convention has mentioned. Yet, seven young men are under the sentence of death in Saudi Arabia recently because they were convicted of a robbery committed in 2005 on the south of Saudi Arabia. All seven men were between
sixteen and twenty when the authorities arrested them, which means that some of them were children when they stood at court. “It will be outrageous if the Saudi authorities go ahead with these executions,” said Eric Goldstein, deputy Middle East director at Human Rights Watch. “It is high time for the Saudis to stop executing child offenders and start observing their obligations under international human rights law.” I believe that they have been treated as an adult based on the Sharia law, which is Islamic law. In Islam when a boy and girl enters puberty that is mean he or she is old enough to be treated as an adult. Yet, in my opinion, they deserve a second chance to live for tow reasons. The first reason is that the holy Quran says in Surah Al-Maeda, Verse 32 “Whoever saves the life of a person is it as if he saved the life of the whole of humankind”, which means saving a life is more important than taking it away. The second reason is that we should ask ourselves why these young men committed this robbery? If they had jobs they may not have committed this crime. They should have a job to achieve their basic needs, instead of being executed because execution is not the right solution for their problem.

One of the things that the convention mentioned is that “The child shall be protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation “(convention on the rights of the child, article 9). In my opinion, one of the worst acts against children in Saudi Arabia is child marriage. The history of child marriage in Saudi Arabia is based on the misunderstanding for what prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) did. 14 centuries ago, he married a nine years old child called Aisha, which was normal in that period of time. Today people who marry children justify it by using Mohammed’s marriage as an example. My own mother was married at ten, and my sister was nine months later. But, when I asked her why she marry at ten, she
answered me that "because I have six sisters, it was so hard for my father to afford our outlay, but if one of us marry everything would be easier. Also, at the time fifty years ago this was normal and part of our culture". However, society has changed. There are thirty million people in Saudi Arabia. They are well traveled, they are educated, and they want the best for their children. Child marriage has changed in Saudi Arabia because the people have changed. Today, fewer people are getting married young. Zuhiar Al Harthi, a member of Shura, which is the appointed parliament, said “To be frank, I want to say that the marriage of minor girls amounts to the murder of innocence and a violation of childhood”. According to what Al Harthi said, it is an important issue that should be given light in Saudi Arabia, and frankly I totally agree with him that it is the murder of innocence and of childhood. On the other hand, Saudi Justice Minister Mohammed Al Issa said, "The Kingdom is planning to enact a law to regulate the marriage of teenage girls following a surge in such weddings and growing criticism by human rights groups and other international agencies", which means that Saudi Arabia is taking this issue seriously. Moreover, nobody can deny the importance of making a law to prevent the murder of innocence. I believe that all members of the Saudi society should rally against the marriage of children and teenagers because it is constitutes a violation of the rights of child, who really needs to enjoy life.

There are a lot of different acts that may be considered as violence against children, such as taking one of their rights away from them, but beating a child to death is the worst thing that could happen. Unfortunately, some people in Saudi
Arabia may misunderstand what prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) meant when he said, “You and your wealth are your father’s.” (Ibn Majah no. 2292), so they think that they have the rights to do whatever they want to their children. That is exactly what happened in Saudi Arabia a few months ago, when a girl called “Lama” which did not exceed five years old, tasted the torture and mistreatment at the hands of her father who used all kind of torture instruments on his daughter. She lost consciousness and she entered the intensive care unit and then died. "The absence of laws [to protect women and children] produce cases like Lama, who die waiting for justice, and this absence of legislation will keep producing others like Lama we may or may not know about," Professor al Bakr wrote in Al Jazirah. Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) affirmed in his saying that children should be well treated, fed, educated and gently disciplined in order to create a godly society on earth. But, what her father did to her is the antithesis of what the prophet has affirmed, and no one in this world would accept what Lama’s father did. Furthermore, Legal Counsel of the Human Rights Association Khaled Fakhiri said, “The commission visited Lama in the hospital and formally documented the abuse”. In my opinion, the Human Rights Association in Saudi Arabia is no more than decoration. A child has been killed, and they just “formally documented the abuse”.

As an experience, I sent the Human Rights Association in Saudi Arabia an email asking them to provide me any information about the children’s rights to use in my research, but they have not responded ever. Undoubtedly, Lama’s case is one example of the acts of violence against children in Saudi Arabia. Even though her father killed her, he will probably be able to pay blood money, which is money paid in compensation to the family of someone who has been killed. Once it is paid the person can go free. I feel
that the tradition of blood money allows human rights abuses to continue. Certainly abuse happens all over the world, but in Saudi Arabia we have culture that allows for continued abuses.

In summary, I believe that there are a lot of violations of children’s rights in Saudi Arabia, and it is really urgent to have not just a law to protect and respect their rights, but a society that is willing to stand behind this law. The planned executions for children and child marriage in Saudi Arabia are some examples of these violations. Also, Lama’s case is big evidence for just one of thousands of acts of violence against children in Saudi Arabia. That means that Saudi Arabia does not perform what it has committed to do. How is that Lama’s father might go free, but children who steal get executed?
Works Cited


In late 2010, Saudi Arabia’s newspapers opened up the heats against authorities for their failure to enact laws banning child marriage following reports of the wedding of a 12-year-old girl to a 55-years-old man. Also, child’s marriage constitutes a violation of the rights of the child, who at this age needs to enjoy her childhood.

This article shows the marriage of minor girls amounts to a murder of innocence and violation of childhood. Also, that media institution should play a bigger role in defending children and their rights.


The convention on the rights of the child is the first legally binding to protect children’s right in the world. The convention sets out these rights in 54 articles to clarify the basics human needs for children everywhere.

This article shows that the national governments have committed themselves to protecting children’s rights. It explains which rights that have been taking away from them.


Seven young men were between 16 and 20 when the authorities arrested them for allegedly committing a robbery in the south of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has executed people in the past few years for crimes committed when they were children.
This article shows how Saudi Arabia is breaking one of the conventions on the rights of the child articles. Also, it shows that they should start observing their obligations under the convention on the rights of the child.


A Saudi Arabian human rights activist has called for a child abuse law in Saudi Arabia after a five-years-old called Lama who was allegedly killed by her father. Then he had been released after paying $50,000, which is blood money to Lama’s mother.

This article shows that the absence of laws to protect women and children in Saudi Arabia produced cases like Lama. Also, this absence will keep producing other cases like Lama, who die waiting for justice.


Saudi authorities have drafted a law to curb child marriages. After a surge in such cases triggered bitter criticism by local media and protects by human rights groups.

This article shows that the Saudi’s authorities are talking this issue seriously. They are hoping the new law would contribute to ending all problems and confusion associated with female teenage marriage.