

WORLD DAY AGAINST  
THE DEATH PENALTY



**WOMEN**  
SENTENCED TO DEATH:  
AN INVISIBLE REALITY

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19<sup>TH</sup> WORLD DAY AGAINST THE DEATH PENALTY  
**TESTIMONIALS FROM WOMEN  
SENTENCED TO DEATH**

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Every effort has been made to preserve the testimonies in the original form in which they were received, with edits being made either for clarity, security, or for length. If a testimony has been edited, it will be stated.

*We thank all those who agreed to share their testimonies and their stories.*

## |AMERICAS

### Sabrina Butler-Smith (USA, Mississippi)



*Sabrina Butler-Smith was sentenced to death in 1990 for killing her son- a crime she did not commit. She was fully exonerated five years later.*

My name is Sabrina Butler-Smith. I was just a teenager when the state of Mississippi sentenced me to death for a crime I did not commit.

On the evening of April 11, 1989 I discovered that Walter Jr., my nine-month-old son, was not breathing. Following my neighbors advice, I gave my son CPR and rushed him to the hospital, but despite all of our efforts, Walter Jr. died the next day. The very same day, I was arrested for child abuse due to the bruises left from my CPR attempts. I was only 18 years old.

In March of 1990 my trial began. I did not testify and there were no witnesses called. The prosecution was determined to convince the jury that I inflicted fatal wounds on my son intentionally. They succeeded.

**“How could this happen to me when I was only trying to save my son?”**

When I walked onto death row at 19 years old, they told me I was going to die there. As I entered my new home, a 6 by 9 ft cell no bigger than your bathroom, I began to give up hope. How could this happen to me when I was only trying to save my son?

My case finally went to retrial in 1995. At this trial the truth finally came out when the medical examiner changed his opinion of my son’s cause of death. Walter Jr. died from a kidney malady, it had absolutely nothing to do with my CPR attempts.

After six and a half years in prison, two years and nine months on death row, I was finally exonerated on December 17, 1995. Today, I tell my story as often as possible to end capital punishment, because I believe in creating a world where no one suffers this kind of injustice.

*Testimony collected by Witness to Innocence.*

## Victoria Drain (USA, Ohio)

Victoria Drain, a trans woman, was sentenced to death in Ohio in 2020. The following is a poem she wrote on 4 April 2021.

### TIME

Sand slips, losing its grip through the hands of time  
like a forgotten girls life falls through the cracks

lost somewhere between the concrete blocks and razor wire

an elegant autobiography etched into prison walls

with pretty nails and home made make-up  
surrounded by misogynistic hieroglyphics

like a single feminine rose drowning in a sea of thorns

Next to pictures of strangers she thinks she remembers

if memories could be more than just enemies to her

Continuously drifting through her thoughts and her dreams

like a long, lonely river flowing refusing to surrender

As she paces her cell and finally realizes

that time can never truly heal, or feel

it will only reveal that even mirrors are capable of lies

and forever and forgiveness, love and redemption

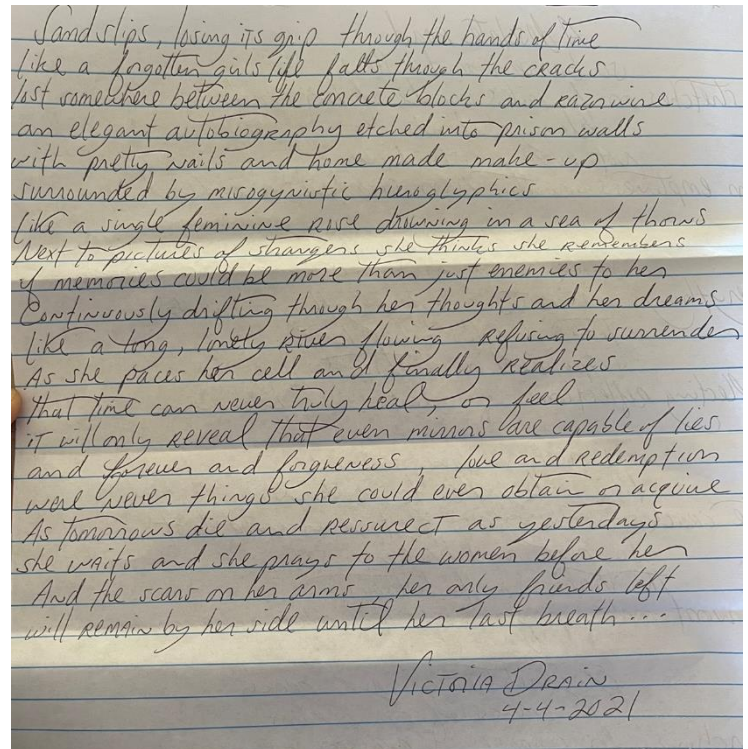
were never things she could ever obtain or acquire

As tomorrows die and resurrect as yesterdays

she waits and she prays to the women before her

And the scars on her arms, her only friends left

Will remain by her side until her last breath...



Testimony collected by the Office of the Ohio Public Defender.

## Shawna Forde (USA, Arizona)

*Shawna Forde has been on death row in the State of Arizona since 2011.*

Valentine's Day 2011 (...) I enter Perryville Women's Corrections Lumley Unit where death row is housed. As I pull up at the gate to my new yard, courageously, I hold my head high and fix my gaze with indomitable will at my oppressors, as my hands and feet are bound in chains walking through the sea of brown uniforms to my cell on death row. I made no sound as the intensity of realization weighed heavy in my soul, the utter

**“It’s an unspeakable, horrifying coldness, being sentenced to death.”**

feeling of aloneness, a weak echo pushing my feet, one foot in front of the other. An acid test of my strength in a cold, stark environment. As inmates stood with ghostly faces silently watching my descent into hell of a new kind.

Treatment of those imprisoned in solitary confinement indefinitely [is inhuman]; never to escape the feeling of chains that bind me whenever my door opens, my freedom was reduced to a 8x11 cell. It’s an unspeakable, horrifying coldness, being sentenced to death. It is barbarically brutal. Another elemental component of the death penalty is that of dehumanization; the death penalty requires the violent restrictions and overthrow of the most important characteristic of humanity, the God given unalienable right of individual person hood. The right to life.<sup>1</sup>

*Testimony received by lifespark.*

## Sunny Jacobs (USA, Florida)

*Sonia “Sunny” Jacobs was wrongfully convicted of killing a police officer in 1976 and sentenced to death in the State of Florida, along with her partner. She spent 17 years in prison before being exonerated. She is pictured with Peter Pringle below, her husband, also wrongfully convicted of a capital crime in Ireland in 1980 and exonerated 15 years later.*



On February 20, 1976, I, my partner Jesse, and our two children were in a car with a third man when two police approached for a routine inspection. The children and I were in the back seat. The third man shot and murdered the two officers.

We were apprehended and the shooter claimed that Jesse and I pulled the trigger.

The police contemplated shooting us and saying we tried to escape. The third entered into a plea deal from the D.A. and testified against us in court. He received life imprisonment and we were sentenced to death.

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<sup>1</sup> This testimony has been edited for length and relevancy to the 2021 World Day theme. For more written by Shawna Forde, you may consult her blog at: *The Shawna Forde* [blog@blogspot.com](http://blog@blogspot.com)



While on death row, I was not allowed to speak with other prisoners and my vocal chords began to atrophy. After 5 years, my sentence was reduced to life imprisonment. The actual shooter recanted his statement many times but this evidence was kept confidential. Jesse was wrongfully executed in May, 1990.

**“The police contemplated shooting us and saying we tried to escape.”**

As the evidence of prosecutorial malfeasance came to light, the D.A. offered me a plea bargain for a lower charge. I accepted and was released from prison in October, 1992 having spent nearly 17 years wrongfully incarcerated.

In 2005, Susan Sarandon played me in the film version of "The Exonerated." In 2011, I married Peter Pringle, an exonerated former Irish prisoner, who was also wrongfully convicted of shooting a police officer. He spent 15 years [as a] prisoner also sentenced to death. We operate the Sunny Healing Center in Ireland, and the Sunny Living Center in the U.S which offer repose and support for those who have been wrongfully convicted after they have been released from prison, many of them from death row.

*Testimony collected by the Sunny Center Foundation and the Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Research Center.*

### **Debra Milke (USA, Arizona)**

*Debra Milke was on death row for 24 years in the State of Arizona. She was fully exonerated in 2015.*

In December 1989, I was a single mother with a 4-year-old son named Christopher. A male friend, with whom I lived, took my son to visit Santa at the mall. Unbeknownst to me, Christopher was taken to the desert by my friend and another accomplice where he was shot 3 times in the head. Soon after, they lied to me and the police, and claimed that Christopher went missing in the mall.



**“The state violated womanhood, motherhood, and the law, and I languished on death row for 22 years because of it.”**

While in a state of despair waiting for my son to return, I was later informed of his murder and arrested at the same time. The detective claimed I had confessed to participating in the crime. I did not confess, and I did not waive my right to an attorney. There was no evidence of

a confession; no witness, no audio/video tape, and no signed confession. There was also no evidence linking me to the crime. The suggested motives were to receive \$5000 of life insurance, and a fear of seeing Christopher grow up to be a drug addict like his father.

The prosecutor hid the detective's long history of malfeasance and decided what story to tell the jury instead of letting the evidence tell the story. My character was assassinated, and I was deemed criminal by associating, unknowingly, with bad men. The state violated womanhood, motherhood, and the law, and I languished on death row for 24 years because of it. I am free today thanks to 3 U.S. federal judges who reviewed my case and granted my Habeas Corpus."

*Testimony collected by the Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Research Center and Witness to Innocence.*

### **Darlie Lynn Routier (USA, Texas)**

*Darlie Lynn Routier has been on death row in the State of Texas since 1997.*

In the early morning of June 6, 1996, an intruder entered my Texas home and stabbed my two sons, Devon, age 6, and Damon, age 5. He then slashed my face and throat, missing my carotid artery by 2 mm. Had I not been wearing a necklace, I would have bled out and died.

The funeral, delayed while I was in the hospital recovering, occurred on Devon's birthday. After a solemn and tearful ceremony, we celebrated the birthday by spraying 'silly string,' my children's favorite plaything, over the graves.

Police covertly filmed the funeral. Soon after, I was arrested and charged with murder. They allege that I murdered by two sons and then slashed myself as a cover-up. The only evidence presented at trial was the silly string video, and my recent bout with depression. The jury found me guilty, and I was sentenced to death.

We had a large house and were financially well off. I was amply insured. Many think he [*Darlie's husband*] was behind this.

Before he was executed in April 2014, Tommy Sells, a confessed (22+) serial killer, described many murders-one eerily similar to this case.

The American NBC network televised a four part series about me. At first the investigators were skeptical of my guilt, but gradually changed their opinion. A quote from the interview: "You are lying to us. If you didn't do it, who did?"

The media love femme fatales. Amanda Knox said, "I think people love monsters, and want to see them. They need vents for fear and rage." It is true. I am the perfect example.

*Testimony collected by Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Research Center and Witness to Innocence.*



## Erica Sheppard (USA, Texas)

*Erica Sheppard is currently on death row in the State of Texas.*

At trial, I felt that as a Black woman I was held to impossibly high standards. If I cried, I was too emotional, but if I didn't cry, then I was cold and heartless. In fact, my lawyer told me to show as little emotion as possible during the trial so that I wouldn't come across as an angry Black woman, but I think the jury and the judge interpreted this as me not having any remorse. Since I was convicted and sentenced to death, the racism and sexism has only gotten worse. Take my medical care, for example. I have a degenerative spinal condition that leaves me in constant pain. But if I cry out because officers touch me and hurt me, they tell me I'm just being "overly dramatic" and a "hysterical" woman. Sometimes I feel I'm supposed to just sit back and take all of this abuse just because I'm Black. That's my history—I'm a slave.

**"Since I was convicted and sentenced to death, the racism and the sexism has only gotten worse."**

For example, on one occasion, I was coming back from the hospital and officers asked me to get out of the van. I said I couldn't do it because I couldn't move, but the officers didn't believe me, and sprayed me with a chemical agent right in my face. They dropped me on the floor, then grabbed me to drag me back to my cell. It was like I was a rag doll. Their fingerprints formed bruises that were left on my body for probably about a week. At that point I realized I was not human; these people do not see me as human; these people do not care about me. After that, I could not take any more victimization.

*Testimony collected by Cornell University's Center on the Death Penalty Worldwide. Written on the basis of an interview conducted with Erica Sheppard on 14 April 2021.*

### Masumi Hayashi (Japan)

*Masumi Hayashi was sentenced to death in Japan in 2002.*

In July of 1998, 4 people died after eating poisoned curry at a festival in my neighborhood. After the curry was found to contain arsenic, I became a suspect. I helped prepare the curry, and my husband frequently used arsenic in his extermination business.

After being named as a suspect, the mass media descended like a pack of jackals. 24 hours a day they stood on ladders and photographed me, my husband and our four children. My kids were accosted, "do you think your mother is a murderer? What will you do if she is arrested?" They would even forage through our trash.

**“After being named as a suspect, the mass media descended like a pack of jackals. 24 hours a day they stood on ladders and photographed me, my husband and our four children.”**

Under Japanese law, the prosecution must provide a criminal motive to the court. The assumed motive was vengeance- my anger at slights from neighborhood people. None of this was ever proven. The media love a femme fatale and my picture appeared on the front page of every major newspaper. Despite the lack of evidence, I was sentenced to death.

Conditions on death row in Japan are shocking. I can leave my tiny cell 3 times a week for exercise in a covered cage much like those in dog shelters. There is no t.v. except for the longer national holidays which come twice a year. I receive visits from one son who travels two hours one way for a 20-minute visit.

Appeals in my case are continuing, and I am grateful for support. I thank you for your attention and hope that the death penalty will be abolished worldwide.

*Testimony collected by the Japan Innocence and Death Penalty Research Center.*



## Merri Utami (Indonesia)



*Merri Utami was convicted for drug trafficking, a charge that she consistently insists she had no knowledge of, in 2002. Fourteen years later, her name was listed on the execution list, and she was transferred to Nusakambangan Island, Cilacap, where executions are usually take place. Her execution was delayed due to public outcry and a clemency request made by LBH Masyarakat, Merri Utami's legal team.*

“The first time I stepped into Tangerang Detention Center, I was terrified. Then, at the moment the judges sentenced me to death, my emotion began to stir uncontrollably. Living in the prison, I tried to make

peace with the unimaginable environment. I filled my days with gardening. I then became involved in many activities, from making music to praying.”

“One night, two prison guards woke me up. The guards informed me that I had to go Cilacap, Central Java. I fell into silence. My eyes looked at the cell once inhabited by the late Rani Andriyani, another death row inmate who faced the same situation I was facing now. In Nusakambangan I lost my appetite. For two days, I did not meet anyone except the wardens. The next (few) days, I was met by my daughter who brought along my infant grandchild. It was the height of my sorrow. Everything in Cilacap prison appeared so unfamiliar. Every time I heard gates being opened or padlocks unlocked, my blood rushed; this went on again and again for so long.

**“Every time I heard gates being opened or padlocks unlocked, my blood rushed; this went on again and again for so long.”**

I hope to be free, together with my family and other people, and become once again a citizen without the status of a deceased death row inmate.”

*Testimony sent by LBH Masyarakat (Community Legal Aid Institute)<sup>2</sup>*

## Wu Jou-yu (Taiwan)

*Wu Jou-yu has been sentenced to death in Taiwan in 2020. The original language her testimony was sent was in Chinese (found below).*

In November 2020, WU Jou-yu was sentenced to death in the first instance in New Taipei District Court. The case is appealing in the High Court and is yet to be settled.

Wu had raised her two young children all by herself for years. She's been suffering from depression, and chose to end the lives of not only herself but also her children, for fear that they would become orphans after her death. However, she survived the

<sup>2</sup> Source : <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2020/08/28/if-only-i-were-given-a-chance-to-be-free.html>

incident, while the children were beyond rescue.

The Taiwanese society has considered parenting mostly a mother's responsibility and has been neglecting single mothers' struggles. Adding on with the unfair and unfriendly condition she faced in the labor market, and the absence of any sufficient social and psychological support from the employment, housing and childcare aspects, Wu ended up in the wrong path. After the incident, the court considered Wu only wanted to unleash her discontent from her life when she killed her children cold-bloodedly. Therefore, she was sentenced to death.

**“The Taiwanese society has considered parenting mostly as mother’s responsibility and has been neglecting single mothers’ struggles.”**

It does not help at all for the society to confront this saddening criminal case, just by personalizing it as a social problem, neglecting the experience of the perpetrator and easily excluding a person from the society. We have to examine the overall discrimination on female, and make sure the social security measures would be comprehensive and presented timely, so that we can avoid the next similar tragedy.

### In the original version sent in traditional Chinese

2020年11月，吳若妤遭新北地方法院一審判處死刑，目前案件上訴到高院，全案尚未確定。

吳若妤獨自撫養兩名幼子多年，長期受憂鬱症所苦，最後承受不了各式的壓力，欲結束自己的生命，但又擔心小孩成為孤兒，便起了帶孩子自殺的念頭。最後自己於該事件中倖存，兩名小孩則來不及挽救。

長期以來台灣社會將育兒視為母親之責任，忽略單親媽媽的困境，再加上在勞動市場中遭遇的不平等和不友善對待，沒有任何就業、居住、托育等實質有效的社會和心理支持，讓吳若妤作出了錯誤的決定。案件發生後，法院認為吳若妤殺害兩位小孩只是為了宣洩自己對生活的不滿，行徑冷血，因而做出死刑判決。

將社會問題個人化，忽視加害者的生命經驗而恣意將個人進行社會排除，並無助於集體社會共同面對該沉痛之社會案件。唯有通盤檢討現行體制對於女性的社會歧視，社會福利政策是否完善且即時有效介入，才能避免下一次的傷害。

*Testimony collected and translated by the Taiwan Alliance to End the Death Penalty.*

## MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

### Fatemeh Haqiqatpajuh (Iran)



*Fatemeh Haqiqatpajuh was executed in 2008 for defending her daughter from being raped.<sup>3</sup>*

“Ms. Haqiqatpajuh was arrested in [...] 2001 following the disappearance of her husband, Mohammad, and discovery of his body in a river near Tehran. [...] During the trial [of her husband’s murder] Ms. Haqiqatpajuh stated [...] she woke up hearing noises from her daughter’s room. She ran there and saw her daughter’s defenseless and naked body in the hands of her husband. She attacked him. ‘My child was only 15 and was crushed under his body. I fought with him.’ [...] [During her trial] there was only one session and Ms. Haqiqatpajuh had to defend herself without an attorney.”

*Memorial and photo sent by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center.*

### Reyhaneh Jabbari Malayeri (Iran)

*Reyhaneh Jabbari Malayeri was hanged in 2014 for the death of a man that occurred out of self-defense.<sup>4</sup>*

In the spring of 2007, when she was 19 years old, [Jabbari] met Mr. Morteza Abolali Sarbandi, a 47-year-old doctor and former Intelligence Ministry employee, at an ice cream parlor. [...] According to Ms. Jabbari, she had visited the apartment on that day, under the impression that it was a workplace. She went there for the purpose of designing the interior decoration of a surgery. She realized, however, that Mr Sarbandi intended to rape her; hence wounded him by stabbing him in the shoulder with a knife. She fled the scene after calling for an ambulance.



[According to diary entries Jabbari wrote while in prison], “He took out a small packet (condom) and said: Do you know what this is? I knew. I was seized with fear. I stood up. He came forward. ... I was soaking with sweat. ... I headed toward the door and turned the handle. But the door would not open. He was laughing with his eyes. Where are you going? The door is locked. ... He said, “You can only leave here when I let you.

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<sup>3</sup> The testimonial has been edited for length and clarity. Fatemeh Haqiqatpajuh’s full story can be found here: <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-7767/fatemeh-haqiqatpajuh>.

<sup>4</sup> The testimonial has been edited for length and clarity. Reyhaneh Jabbari Malayeri’s full story can be found here: <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-7338/reyhaneh-jabbari-malayeri>

[...] Suddenly, I noticed the knife. I mustered whatever strength I had left in me and said: “Look. Let me go, and I promise not to tell anyone what has happened. In fact, I will forget it totally.” He let go of me and took a step back. Go? Go where? I took the last decision of my life. ... I was no longer in his clutches. I jumped. I was holding the

**“Judge Tardast gave her reason and motive for the murder as her masculine spirit, narcissism, lack of stable personality, psychological state, and an abnormal relationship with her family.”**

knife. ... He said, mockingly, “You want to hit me?” ... He yelled, “Look at me. You want to hit me, with that?” ... I ran as fast as I could into the kitchen. ... It had a balcony. ... I opened the door. ... I bent down the balcony and aimed to jump. ... I got scared. I turned around. He was standing in front of the television set by the prayer mat. I wanted to aim for the door, again. He pounced quicker than I. ... I implored him, saying, “You are a devout man. By God, please let me go. ... Just let me go.” He said, “Why are you acting like a gypsy? What’s the matter with you? I burst into

tears. ... He approached me. I stepped back. He stepped forward. I screamed: I will hit you... He yelled, ... “You cannot do a damn thing.” I said, “Get back.” But he didn’t. ... He went red in the face, again [saying], Hit me. ... I raised my hand and drew a very long breath. I brought down my hand with all my strength.”

In the opinion of Judge Tardast, who presided over the case, Ms. Jabbari's relationship with the victim was not a business one, hence her claim of rape is invalid. To prove his point, the judge said that she was not a virgin and had been involved in an illicit affair with her boss at the firm where she was employed. Judge Tardast gave her reason and motive for the murder as her masculine spirit, narcissism, lack of stable personality, psychological state, and an abnormal relationship with her family.

*Memorial and photo sent by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center.*

### **Zeinab Sakaanvand Lokran (Iran)**

*Reyhaneh Jabbari Malayeri was hanged in 2018 for murder, despite repeatedly recanting her confessions.<sup>5</sup>*

Mrs. Sakaanvand was born on June 22, 1994 in a poor, traditional Kurdish family in the city of Maku in West Azerbaijan Province. She got married in February/March 2010 when she was just 15, and according to one of her relatives, she was abused verbally and physically by her husband (HRANA, Center for Human Rights in Iran, Amnesty International newsletter, October 11, 2016).



Mrs. Sakaanvand’s case was related to her husband’s death in the city of Urmia, West Azerbaijan Province, on February 24, 2012.

At the time of the incident, Mrs. Sakaanvand was 17 years old. International laws have strictly prohibited capital punishment for those who were under the age of 18 at the time of committing a crime. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and

<sup>5</sup> The testimonial has been edited for length and clarity. Zeinab Sakaanvand Lokran’s full story can be found here: <https://www.iranrights.org/memorial/story/-8333/zeinab-sekaanvand-lokran>



Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Iran has the obligation not to impose capital punishment for an offence committed under the age of eighteen.

According to available information, Mrs. Sekaanvand had confessed that at the night of the incident, she and her husband were in her father-in-law's house for dinner and after watching a movie, they returned to their home. Then they had an argument and she went off in a huff. When her husband noticed she was sad he "offered for her to tie his hands, feet, and eyes up and beat him so as to calm down. But after she tied her husband's hands, feet, and eyes, she took a knife from the kitchen and stabbed twice in her husband's throat, which eventually caused his death. Then she turned herself into police (Mizan and ILNA News Agencies).

In this regard, the Kurdistan Human Rights Network quoted Mrs. Sekaanvand's court appointed lawyer: "Considering the fact that Zeinab was right-handed and the throat was cut from behind, the direction of the wound on the victim's throat should be from left to right. However, the direction was from right to left, and shows that the victim's throat had been cut from the front. If Zeinab's confessions about cutting victim's throat from behind were true, regardless of the direction of the knife's movement, given that the wall behind Zeinab was bloody, her clothing should be bloody too, which was not at all the case."

According to available information, Mrs. Sekaanvand repeatedly recanted her confessions. According to one of her cellmates, Mrs. Sekaanvand has consistently denied committing the murder since 2016, and told other prisoners that "she confessed instead of someone else, and never thought it would get her in such trouble".

*Memorial and photo sent by the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center.*

## **|Sub-Saharan Africa**

### **Maimuna Abdulmumini (Nigeria)**

*Maimuna Abdulmumini, a child bride, was sentenced to death by hanging on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 by a High Court in Katsina State for an offence she allegedly committed as a minor.*

She was arrested on March 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, for allegedly setting her husband on fire and causing his death. At the time, she was only 13 years old and had already been married for 5 months. She was initially released on bail and later re-arrested for the same offense after she attained the age of 18. She was charged for culpable homicide, tried and sentenced to death.

Maimuna Abdulmumini was subsequently admitted to the death row in Katsina Central Prisons, and was nursing her 18 month old baby girl inside the prison. Her baby was only released to Maimuna's mother after the intervention of Avocats Sans Frontières France in her case.

On August 13, 2013, Avocats Sans Frontières France filed an application before the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice challenging the application of the death penalty to a minor as a contravention of international Human Rights standards.

On June 10, 2015, the ECOWAS Court delivered a landmark judgement in the case stating that the death sentence passed on Maimuna Abdulmumini for an offence she committed as a minor was an infringement on her right to life.

The Court also awarded monetary damages to Maimuna to the tune of Five million Naira as compensation for the violation of her right as a minor. In June 2015, the Court of Appeal, Kaduna division set aside the death sentence passed on Maimuna Abdulmumini. She was released from death row after spending over three years on death row.

*Testimony phrased and sent by Avocats Sans Frontiers France (ASF) office based in Abuja, Nigeria.*

### **Anonymous (Mauritania)**

*Testimony given by a woman who wishes to remain anonymous, who was sentenced to death in 2010 in Mauritania. It was recorded in 2018. <sup>6</sup>*

I was sentenced to death for infanticide in Mauritania in 2010. After being the victim of a forced marriage, I decided to flee my home village and come to Nouakchott to work as a housekeeper for individuals. I met my boyfriend in Nouakchott, got pregnant and gave birth, but I could not keep the baby. I was accused of infanticide.

In 2010, a police commissioner came to my home late in the morning to arrest me. He did not tell me why he was arresting me, he spoke to me in Hassanya, a language I do not speak. I only speak Fulani. I stayed two days at the police station, the policemen were very respectful towards me. I did not ask to see my lawyer because I did not know that I had this right at that time. On the third day, the judge received me for a few minutes and I was immediately transferred to the women's prison.

**“He did not tell me why he was arresting me, he spoke to me in Hassanya, a language I do not speak.”**

In the women's prison, the first weeks were very hard. I didn't have access to much. The national guards insulted us, and then I became the head of the court, the representative of the inmates, and because of this role, the guards respected me more. There was also another woman sentenced to death during this period. My brother was able to visit me every few months. My family, who are poor, nevertheless managed to raise enough money for me to have a lawyer. I saw him twice in prison, but he did not come on the day of the trial in the criminal court, which was in open session. No representative of my family was present, the travel was too expensive, my family living more than four hundred kilometers from the Mauritanian capital. The verdict fell: I was sentenced to death, I understood nothing of the hearing which took place in Hassanya. I did not have a Fulani

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<sup>6</sup> This testimony was sent by Plateforme des Droits de l'Homme as an excerpt from the comprehensive report published by Ensemble contre la peine de mort (Together Against the Death Penalty) entitled *Mauritanie : Le bagne au pays des sables* (Mauritania : Prison in the land of sand). The original language is French. Pg. 85 <https://www.ecpm.org/communiquede-presse-sortie-dune-mission-denquete-inedite-sur-la-peine-de-mort-et-les-conditions-de-detention-et-de-traitement-des-condamnes-a-mort-en-mauritanie/>

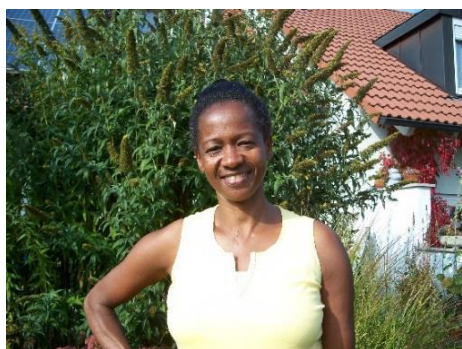
interpreter, and it was a Fulani policeman who explained to me, by taking me out of the criminal court, that I had been sentenced to death.

In the women's prison, I could wash myself and my clothes. I only saw the doctor two months after my arrival in prison, and I had to be transferred to the hospital several times for specialized examinations.

The Noura Foundation had contacted a dedicated lawyer to work on the appeal of the criminal court's decision against me. The appeal file was being put together when, on March 8, 2016, after representations to the President of the Republic, I was pardoned. My ordeal had thus ended, and I was finally released. I was able to see my children again whom I had not seen for six years. Since my release, I have been trying to reintegrate, I want to develop a small business, but it is very difficult after six years of detention.

*Testimony sent by PDH (Plateforme des Droits de l'Homme).*

### **Ghati Mwita (Tanzania)**



*Ghati Mwita is a 62-year-old woman who has served 13 years in prison for the murder of a man who died in an accidental fire in her home.*

Like many women in prison, Ghati had lived a difficult life and had overcome many challenges. She first married when she was only 13 years and gave birth to her only child. Unhappy in her marriage, she ran away and joined the police force, where she excelled. However, whilst working, she was raped by her superior and forced to leave her job.

After leaving the force, she met her second husband, Manfred, a German national who was working in Tanzania. They married and moved to Germany, where they lived a happy life for nearly 20 years. In 2007, Ghati returned to Tanzania and set up a charity combatting FGM (female genital mutilation), a practice she was subjected to as a girl. However, this happy return was short-lived after her arrest and imprisonment.

Ghati was held in police custody for 6 days without access to a lawyer. At her trial, there was no clear evidence against her and all the witness testimonies were riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Despite this, Ghati was sentenced to death and spent many years on death row. Ghati has always maintained her innocence throughout the years.

In 2020, Ghati's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. However, Ghati is unwell as she is HIV positive and the difficult prison conditions have taken a toll on her mental and physical wellbeing. Ghati is currently seeking a pardon from the President.

*Testimony collected by Reprivee.*