

Nov. 10, 2008: Somalia: USCIRF Condemns Stoning of 13-Year-Old Girl

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WASHINGTON—The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom condemns the recent death by stoning of a 13-year-old girl in Somalia and calls on the U.S. government to join with other states in speaking out decisively in international fora against such grave human rights abuses.

“There can be no justification for stoning, for torturing, this child to death just because it is cloaked in the name of a religious punishment,” said Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer.

Stoning is a form of torture, in which the victim is killed in a particularly brutal way; in many cases, the victims are girls or women accused of adultery. Most Muslim-ruled states prohibit stoning for crimes set out in the Koran, and even strictly Muslim-ruled nations where shariah deeply influences law apply the punishment rarely for adultery because of the Koranic requirement of four witnesses. Governments that still practice stoning include those of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan.

The Somali child, identified as Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow, was raped by three men, according to Amnesty International. When her family reported the rape to the authorities, the girl was accused of adultery and ordered stoned to death. The killing was carried out Oct. 28 by 50 men, before about 1,000 witnesses, in a public stadium in the Somali port city of Kismayu, which is held by al-Shabaab rebels. Al-Shabaab militias have established “a strict interpretation of Islam” on the communities they control, according to the U.S. State Department. Fighters on all sides of the conflict in Somalia have attacked and abused civilians.

Somalia has not had an effective, internationally recognized central government for 16 years, and it is not a party to any major international human rights instrument. The U.S. government has not maintained a diplomatic presence in Somalia since 1991, when the brutal dictator Siad Barre fell, and does not formally recognize as a government any group having control over any part of the country. The Commission calls for the perpetrators of the rape and those who ordered and executed the brutal killing of Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow to be held to account for their crimes.