

-Humanitarian Law RULES!-

Center for the Study of Humanitarian Law

Newsletter

January 2019

Canadian Government has granted asylum for a Saudi teen, Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, who fled in fear from her allegedly abusive family

On 7 January, 2019, Rahaf Mohammed al-Qunun, aged 18 while on a trip with her family in Kuwait, tried to escape from her family and intended to travel to Australia via Bangkok to seek asylum, but a Saudi diplomat had seized her passport at Suvarnabhumi Airport. She refused to return to Kuwait and barricaded herself in hotel room and used her twitter account to seek asylum and help from international organization. Rahaf was often beaten by her family and she one kept in a room for six months for cutting her hair in a way that her family did not agree with, and she said, “she had renounced Islam, which is punishable by death in Saudi Arabia.” According to her interview in The New York Times, she stated “They will kill me”.¹ Thai authorities allowed her to access The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and did not expel her to Kuwait.

The UNHCR is working with governments and partners to support communities and provide more opportunity for refugees. Currently, her case is under the protection of UNHCR and other countries. Australia government has considered case of Rahaf’s intention for seeking asylum, due to moving too slow in processing of UNHCR’s request. UN has declared her as a refugee and switched the Canada to granting asylum.

The United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugee of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol defines a refugee as someone who has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. The UNHCR can grant the refugee status if she is outside the country of her nationality, and unable or unwilling to avail herself of the protection of that country.²

There is reasonable ground to consider a legitimate refugee: (1) The history of being arrested for disobeying her father: her family will kill her if she returned back. (2) Save Rahaf: she has suffered both physical and psychological abuse. (3) The real feeling of Saudi woman about life.

The Canadian government has responded to accepting asylum application from the United Nation office. According to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told reporters, Canada will stand up for supporting human rights including woman’s right.³ After granting the asylum, her story will encourage other women to be free and brave in order to enjoy their rights and freedom.

¹ Richard C.Paddock, and Ben Hubbard, “Saudi Woman who tried to flee family said, ‘they will kill her’,” The New York Times, Jan. 7, 2019,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/06/world/middleeast/saudi-thailand-rahaf-alqunun.html> (accessed January 15, 2019).

² UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, Refugee Status Determination, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-status-determination.html>

³ “Rahaf al-Qunun: Saudi teen granted asylum in Canada,” BBC, Jan.11, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46844431> (accessed January 16, 2019)

LIBRARY HOURS

January 2019

Mon to Fri: 8.45am – 5.30pm

RESEARCH AT THE LIBRARY

Did you know that you can access online databases, Westlaw International and Westlaw UK, at the library? These databases give you access to 1000s of documents that will help you with your research. And if you need help using them, we’re more than happy to assist!

UPCOMING EVENT

Public Lecture Series 2:
How to save the multilateral trading and investment system? by
Prof. Andreas R. Ziegler.

Date: February 11, 2019

Time: 5:30pm - 8:00pm

