

## Death Sentence Of Israeli In Egypt Further Strains Relations

JERUSALEM (WNS) — A 43-year-old Israeli, sentenced to death in Egypt for smuggling heroin, is casting a grim new shadow over the already severely strained relations between Israel and Egypt.

Yosef Tahan, 43, of Ashdod, was transferred to death row in a Cairo prison while Israeli leaders mulled over how to deal with the situation. His sentence must be approved by the council of Muftis (Moslem religious leaders) before it is carried out. The official Egyptian news agency, Mena, reported that a decision would be announced on March 6.

The Egyptian government recently mounted an intensive campaign against drug smuggling and the courts have pronounced death sentences on several foreigners convicted of the crime, but none, so far, has been executed. The possibility that Tahan, the father of four young children, could be the first, has given this criminal case a political dimension.

He was arrested at Cairo airport last August on his way home from Bombay. He reportedly confessed to the Egyptian authorities that he planned to smuggle 1.25 kilograms of heroin into Israel to sell. Drug smuggling is a serious crime in Israel but there is no capital punishment there.

Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir said he was shocked by the sentence and intended to see "what could be done about it." Israeli officials were careful to limit their comments to the humanitarian aspects involved. Minister-Without-Portfolio Ezer Weizman said that Israelis involved in criminal activity abroad could not expect Israeli protection. However, Weizman said if he were asked by the government, he would not hesitate to go to Cairo to exert his influence there to have the death sentence commuted. Tahan's wife, Violet, 35, has appealed to Weizman to use his friendly relations with Egyptian officials to get the sentence reduced or her husband returned to Israel to stand trial here for drug trafficking.

Meanwhile, it was learned that Israel is likely to ask Egypt to extradite Tahan to Israel and thus spare his life. Police Minister Haim Bar-Lev told newsmen he hoped Egypt would extradite Tahan, but he did not indicate whether Israel decided already to ask for his extradition.

The Israeli Embassy in Cairo kept a low profile regarding the fate of Tahan, Yediot Aharonot's correspondent in Cairo reported. The embassy reportedly wants to avoid giving opposition circles in Egypt any pretext to

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exert pressure on the government to execute Tahan soon. Presently his case is reviewed by a council of religious leaders (Muftis). He also still has the option of appealing to higher judicial echelons.

So far the only action the embassy has taken was a request to the

Foreign Ministry in Cairo for a detailed report on the trial, the verdict and the legal possibilities still open to the defendant. A representative of the Israeli Consulate in Cairo was present during the handing down of the death sentence.



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