

# POLICE

## Nigerian Stoning Sentence Overturned

Court acquits woman facing death for adultery

(AP) — A single mother facing death by stoning for adultery had her sentence overturned by an Islamic appeals court Thursday in a case that has sparked international outrage.

A five-judge panel in Katsina, Nigeria rejected the sentence against 32-year-old Amina Lawal, saying she was not caught in the act of adultery and she was not given "ample opportunity to defend herself."

If the sentence had been carried out, the single mother would have been the first woman stoned to death since 12 northern states first began adopting strict Islamic law, or Shariah, in 1999.

Lawal, wrapped in a light orange veil, sat on a stone bench, eyes downcast, cradling her nearly 2-year-old daughter as the ruling was announced at the Katsina State Shariah Court of Appeals under heavy security.

The judges read their verdict, which is final, inside a tiny blue-walled courtroom equipped with ceiling fans to ease the sweltering heat.

Lawal was first convicted in March 2002 following the birth of

her daughter two years after she divorced her husband. Judges rejected Lawal's first appeal in August 2002.

In an hour-long hearing, the panel said Lawal was not caught in the act of adultery and wasn't given enough time to understand the charges against her.

It also cited procedural errors, including that only one judge was present at her initial conviction in March 2002, instead of the three required under Islamic law.

The case had drawn sharp criticism from international rights groups. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's government and world leaders had called for Lawal to be spared. Last week, Brazil even offered her asylum.

Few believed the brutal sentence — in which Lawal would have been buried up to her neck in sand and executed by stoning — would ever be carried out.

Francois Cantier, a lawyer with French group Avocats Sans Frontieres, or Lawyers Without Borders, said the punishment was contrary to the Nigerian constitution and would violate international treaties against torture.

Prosecutors argued Lawal's child was living proof she committed a crime under Shariah.

But lead defense lawyer Aliyu Musa Yawuri said that under some interpretations of Shariah, babies



Amina Lawal and her baby Wasila at the court in Katsina, Nigeria. The 32-year-old single mother was sentenced in March 2002 to be buried up to her neck in sand and then stoned for giving birth to a child out of wedlock. During the appeal case she was set free. (AP photo)

can remain in gestation in a mother's womb for five years, opening the possibility her ex-husband could have fathered the child.

He also argued Lawal's case should be dropped because no lawyers were present when she first testified that she had slept with another man following her divorce. Yawuri said Lawal — a poor, un-

educated woman from a rural family — didn't understand the charges against her at the time.

Lawal has identified her alleged sexual partner, Yahaya Mohammed, and said he promised to marry her. Mohammed, who would also have faced a stoning sentence, has denied any impropriety and has been acquitted for lack of evidence.

## Wonder Stands Up Against Racial Bias

Recording artist asks judge to free man

(AP) — Stevie Wonder has asked a federal judge to free a man convicted as a leader of a West Coast-to-Detroit cocaine and heroin ring.

The Grammy-winning singer came to U.S. District Court for Antonio Ameen's sentencing hearing. Ameen, 37, received 20 years in prison.

Wonder asked to speak in favor of allowing Ameen to remain free on bond during an appeal that is based on race bias. U.S. District Judge John O'Meara declined the request, saying Wonder had covered all his points in a Sept. 30, 2002, letter.

In the letter, Wonder, a former Detroit whose legal name is Steveland Morris, said he'd known Ameen for several years and was impressed with Ameen's parenting during a long, hard criminal case.

"Please look within the deepest part of your heart, spirit and history and use any discretion



Stevie Wonder

that you have to keep this man with his family as long as possible," the letter said.

Over the objections of U.S. Assistant Attorney John Freeman, O'Meara said Ameen and associate Steven Fantroy, 38, of Detroit could remain free until the Bureau of Prisons finds beds for them. O'Meara said he also will consider whether to allow the men to remain free pending their appeals.

Both men said they were denied a fair trial because they are black and no blacks served on their jury.

Wonder, 53, and Ameen met after Ameen became a musician and producer in Los Angeles.

## Tougher DUII Laws Enacted

(AP) — Measures aimed at cracking down on drunken driving were signed into law Thursday by Gov. Ted Kulongoski in a ceremony attended by prosecutors, crime victim advocates and relatives of victims.

"All Oregonians should know that if they drink and get behind the wheel, they will face the consequences," the governor said.

Kulongoski and legislative sponsors said the measures passed by the 2003 Legislature represent the most significant toughening of DUII laws in the past 20 years.

One of the measures imposes longer sentences for those convicted of criminally negligent homicide while driving drunk.

Another, requires a guilty plea before a drunken-driving defendant can enter a treatment program to avoid a longer jail sentence.

A third bill sets stiffer fines for those who refuse a Breathalyzer test.

## Money, Drugs and Guns Behind School Fight

(AP) — A fight at Parkrose High School in northeast Portland that resulted in the suspension of 19 students wasn't fueled by racial tension as initially reported but involved money, drugs and a cache of stolen assault rifles and pistols, police say.

"We pretty quickly figured out this wasn't a race riot," Portland police Detective Dave Anderson said Thursday. "That's not the deal."

Although many questions remain unanswered, detectives have traced the Sept. 12 fight to a dispute over drugs that started last spring. They also uncovered links among some of the teenagers involved in the fight and a chain reaction of threats and drive-by shootings, as well as a marijuana-growing operation and two burglaries in which 21 guns were stolen.

Three students from the school have been arrested, but none of them on charges relating to the fight. Meuy Saechao, 17, and her boyfriend, Alex Coopersmith, 16, were taken into custody Sept. 22 after police found five assault rifles, a 9 mm pistol and a marijuana-growing operation in the girl's home. A 15-year-old boy was taken into custody on an unrelated parole violation.

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