

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Iraq: Amnesty International calls for an independent investigation into the assassination of Dr Hareth al-'Ubaidi

In a letter sent to the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamil al-Maliki, Amnesty International has expressed grave concern at the killing of Dr Hareth al-'Ubaidi, Vice-President of the Human Right Committee of the Iraqi parliament, and requested urgent clarification as to what steps the government has undertaken to investigate the murder. The organization has also called for an independent investigation into reports of torture of detainees in a prison in the city of al-Diwaniyah.

Dr al-'Ubaidi, who also headed the Sunni Accord Bloc in parliament, was shot dead at the end of Friday prayers on 12 June 2009 at al-Shawwaf Mosque in the Baghdad district of al-Yarmuk. After firing at Dr Hareth al-'Ubaidi with a pistol the killer is reported to have thrown a hand grenade at other prayer attendees, killing five people and injuring 12 others, before he was shot and killed by police.

A number of Iraqi parliamentarians have since denounced the killing and attributed Dr Hareth al-'Ubaidi's murder to his human rights work, especially his recent exposure of cases of torture, including rape, of detainees following a visit he undertook a few weeks ago to a women's prison in al-Kadhmiya in Baghdad. Dr al-'Ubaidi told the media that several women detained at the prison told him that they had been raped during interrogation.

Further evidence of torture of detainees is reported to have been brought to light by a human rights body affiliated to al-Diwaniyah Governorate, which has accused the security authorities of torturing detainees during interrogation in order to extract "confessions". Investigators from the Interior Ministry are reported to have identified bruising on 10 of the 170 prisoners in al-Diwaniyah Prison that may have been caused by torture or other ill-treatment.

In its letter, Amnesty International has requested prompt clarification of the steps being taken by the Iraqi authorities to investigate the attack on Dr al-'Ubaidi and other worshippers at al-Shawwaf Mosque, which it strongly condemns, and to establish whether it was perpetrated by a gunman acting alone or with the active assistance of others. Further, the organization has requested prompt clarification of the steps being taken by the Iraqi authorities to investigate the allegations of torture cited above and to bring to justice those responsible for such abuses. In accordance with Iraq's obligations under international human rights law, including the UN Torture Convention (CAT), such investigations should be independent, impartial and conducted and completed without delay. The outcome should be made public and anyone found responsible should be brought to justice through fair trial procedures and without recourse to the death penalty.

The organization has called on the Iraqi authorities to ensure that all detainees have access to regular medical care, families, lawyers of their own choosing and the right to challenge the legality of their detention. In addition, all persons in custody should either promptly charged with recognizable criminal offences and trial in accordance with international standards of fair trial, or released.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org