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Iraq: More executions “no remedy” for worsening security

Amnesty International is greatly concerned by a new surge in executions in Iraq, despite calls by the international community for Iraq to abolish the death penalty. On 19 December, the Iraqi Prime Minister's office announced that a further 13 prisoners had been executed, making 2006 the year with the highest number of executions since Iraq reinstated the death penalty in 2004. At least 60 people have been executed in Iraq since the authorities resumed executions in September 2005, with some 53 reported to have been executed since the beginning of this year.

According to the government, the 13 men executed on 19 December had been convicted of murder, rape and torture. One was reported to have confessed to the killing of 10 people. However, the identities of those hanged have not been made public and the government gave no details of their trials, raising concern that at least some of them may have been sentenced after unfair trials.

According to media reports, after the executions had been carried out the Iraqi authorities released a short film showing a group of men hooded and with their hands tied behind their backs - believed to be the 13 men prior to their execution.

Amnesty International is acutely aware of the grave security situation currently prevailing in Iraq and recognizes fully the government's responsibility to uphold the rule of law and ensure that those who commit murders and other crimes are brought to justice. In doing so, however, the Iraqi authorities must abide by their obligations under international law, including to ensure fair trials, and should not make recourse to the death penalty. The death penalty is a violation of the right to life and the ultimate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Use of this most extreme penalty will provide no remedy for the grave human rights situation in Iraq and serves only to devalue further the right to life.

Amnesty International reiterates its call to the Iraqi authorities to commute all death sentences and abolish the death penalty in law and practice.