

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Syria: Mass arrests of Syrian Kurds and fear of torture and other ill-treatment**

Amnesty International today expressed serious concerns about reports that at least 20 people have been killed and hundreds of Syrian Kurds arrested by security forces in Syria since 12 March 2004.

The arrests reportedly followed clashes at a football match in Qamishli on 12 March 2004 between Kurdish and Arab fans. Security forces reportedly shot into the crowds killing at least 20 people. Three children were said to have been killed in the stampede as the crowds ran to escape the shooting.

Following this incident, clashes between Syrian Kurds and Syrian security forces broke out in Qamishli, Aleppo, al-Hassaka in the North and Damascus. Hundreds of Syrian men and boys as young as 14 years old were said to have been arrested from their homes. Their whereabouts remain unknown to their families. Amnesty International is worried that the killings may have been deliberate or as a result of excessive use of force.

"Those killed and those detained may have been targeted because of their Kurdish origin," Amnesty International said. "Those in detention may be subjected to torture or otherwise ill-treated, given the fact that their whereabouts are still unknown."

Amnesty International calls for an independent and impartial investigation into the killings. Those found responsible should be brought to justice in accordance with international standards for fair trial proceedings.

"The Syrian authorities must make known to those concerned the whereabouts of the detainees to avoid any mistreatment or the generation of more violence," Amnesty International said.

#### **Background:**

An estimated 1.5 million Kurds live in Syria mostly in the Jazira area in the North East of Syria. Today 150,000 Kurds in Syria are denied Syrian nationality and civil rights.

There is a history of violent confrontation between the Syrian authorities and Kurds. In March 1986, during the Festival of *Newroz*, clashes between both sides resulted in several deaths and injuries. In October 1992 Kurds marked the 30th anniversary of the census which deprived many Kurds of their Syrian nationality and basic civil rights. In response Syrian security forces carried out mass arrests. In 1995 the Syrian authorities banned the traditional *Newroz* celebrations and dozens of Kurds were

arrested.

On 9 March 2004, seven Syrian Kurdish men were reportedly arrested from their homes in the early hours apparently following Kurdish demonstrations in Qamishli and al-Hassaka on 8 March (see UA MDE 24/018/2004, 12 March 2004).

Public Document

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