

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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United Kingdom: Forcible return to Iraq would be unlawful

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the UK government's plan to forcibly return scores of rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers to Kurdish areas in Iraq which the organization considers are neither stable nor safe. The authorities are yet to set a date for the return, but there is increasing speculation that the deportations are imminent. Many rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers have already been detained.

"The assumption that people can return to Iraq in safety and with dignity because they are returned to Kurdish areas is a dangerous proposition," said Amnesty International. "The UK should carefully consider the consequences that its decision may have for those people."

In light of the lack of security and widespread human rights abuses in the country, Amnesty International believes that rejected Iraqi asylum-seekers should not be forced to return to any part of Iraq.

The security situation in Iraq has continued to deteriorate in the past few months. Hundreds of civilians have been killed and hundreds more injured in attacks by armed groups. Some died or were wounded in attacks aimed primarily at US-led forces but others were victims of direct attacks intended to cause the greatest possible civilian loss of life. Some attacks have been carried out indiscriminately by suicide bombers; others have been carefully targeted assassinations of police personnel or individuals connected to the Iraqi transitional government.

US-led forces too have been responsible for gross human rights violations against Iraqi civilians, including excessive use of force, often resulting in deaths, torture or other ill-treatment, long-term detention without charge or trial and arbitrary arrests.

While most of the violence reported in the media is taking place in Baghdad and in the areas west and northwest of the capital, killings, revenge-killings, and abductions do take place in the Kurdish areas in the north and in southern Iraq, but they rarely receive media coverage.

"At this time, the return of Iraqis must be completely voluntary. People whose asylum claims have been dismissed can only be returned when sufficient guarantees are in place to ensure that their return is safe and dignified," said Amnesty International. "To physically force people back, or to deprive them of their rights in a way that leaves them with no choice but to return would be a breach of international human rights and refugee law."

