

15 August 2000

Further information on EXTRA 101/98 (AMR 51/110/98, 16 December 1998) and follow-ups (AMR 51/112/98, 17 December 1998; AMR 51/114/98, 18 December 1998; AMR 51/117/98, 23 December 1998; AMR 51/31/99, 18 February 1999; AMR 51/40/99, 3 March 1999; AMR 51/81/99, 19 May 1999; AMR 51/133/99, 18 August 1999) - Fear of indiscriminate mass killings

US/UK/IRAQ Civilians in Iraq

Despite claims that they are taking steps to minimise civilian casualties, US and UK aircraft are reported to have hit civilian targets during recent air strikes, killing and injuring civilians.

US and UK forces have carried out regular air strikes against targets in northern and southern Iraq ever since the launch of "Operation Desert Fox" in December 1998. Scores of Iraqi civilians have reportedly been killed and injured. According to Iraqi government sources 302 civilians have now been killed.

Amnesty International has issued numerous worldwide appeals since "Operation Desert Fox", expressing concern that civilians were being killed by US and UK air strikes, and called on the US and UK governments to urge their forces to refrain from attacks expected to cause civilian casualties. Both governments replied that their forces had been acting in self-defence and were making great efforts to avoid civilian casualties. However, they did not say what steps they were taking to avoid civilian deaths.

A confidential UN report is said to have found that over a period of five months in 1999, 41 per cent of the victims of US and UK air strikes were civilians.

Following reports of continuing civilian casualties during 2000, Amnesty International wrote to US President Bill Clinton and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair on 15 May, asking what precautions their governments were taking to protect civilians, and asking for details of the targets of the air strikes which had reportedly resulted in civilian casualties. The UK government replied that:

"Only precision guided weapons are used where there is any risk of civilian casualties or collateral damage to civilian infrastructure. The risk of civilian casualties is always a major consideration during the very careful target selection process. We also undertake very careful bomb damage analysis after every incident. For these reasons, we are confident that civilian casualties and damage to civilian infrastructure have been minimal."

The US government did not reply.

However, in the latest air strikes, on 11 August, two civilians were said to have been killed and 19 injured in the town of al-Samawa in southern Iraq, when missiles reportedly hit a warehouse containing building materials and food storage rooms. A Reuters photographer who visited the area said that there were no military installations near the warehouse. Six nearby houses were apparently damaged.

The next day aircraft bombed a railway station in the town, and a number of civilians were reportedly injured. US military sources said that they attacked two Iraqi anti-aircraft sites on 12 August, and added, "coalition aircraft

do not target civilian populations or infrastructure and seek to avoid injury to civilians and damage to civilian facilities."

Amnesty International cannot verify the number of civilian casualties. However, it is concerned that despite US and UK government assurances that they are doing their utmost to avoid civilian casualties, they appear to have taken no appropriate steps to avoid civilian casualties, and civilian deaths are still being reported.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the continuing reports of civilian casualties caused by US and UK air strikes;
- expressing concern that despite repeated assurances, those carrying out the air strikes appear to be ignoring the risk to civilians;
- asking them to urge their forces to refrain from attacks expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life "which would be excessive in relation to the direct military advantage anticipated";
- calling on them to compensate civilian victims or their families.

APPEALS TO:

President

Bill Clinton
The White House
Office of the President
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington DC 20500
USA

Telegrams: President, Washington DC, USA

Faxes: + 1 202 456 2461

E-mails: president@whitehouse.gov

Salutation: Dear President Clinton

Prime Minister

Tony Blair
10 Downing Street
London SW1 2AL
United Kingdom

Telegrams: Prime Minister, London, UK

Telephone: + 44 207 270 3000

Faxes: + 44 207 925 0918 / 270 0196

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of the US and UK accredited to your country.

Those in the US and UK are asked not to write appeals to their own governments.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 26 September 2000.