

AI Index: MDE 14/02/91

Distr: SC/PO

For immediate release Thursday 4 April 1991

@AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALL FOR PROTECTION OF PEOPLE

FLEEING IRAQ

Amnesty International is today appealing directly to governments around the world to live up to their obligation to protect the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Kurds, Shi'as and others now fleeing Iraq by making sure they are not turned back to face virtually certain torture and executions.

"Unless governments act, and act now, they will once again be turning the other way as thousands of people in Iraq are tortured, "disappeared" or killed," Amnesty International said. "Thousands of Kurds were killed by the Iraqi government after the end of the war with Iran, and even more are now at risk of another wave of brutal revenge."

The latest reports coming out of Iraq speak of hundreds of people who have already been summarily killed in rebel areas, Amnesty International said.

The organization is appealing directly to the Turkish government, urging it to immediately re-open its border, closed yesterday in anticipation of a huge influx of Kurds. It is also asking other neighbouring countries, particularly Syria and Iran, to ensure that asylum-seekers are not sent back to Iraq.

An urgent appeal is also being made to the United Nations - through the secretary-general and its member countries, calling for measures to protect the people leaving Iraq. Urgent appeals will also be made to the European Community, Council of Europe, Arab League, Gulf Cooperation Council and individual governments. "They should also make it clear to Iraq that human rights violations are totally unacceptable."

"Human rights abuses are not an internal problem that stop at a country's border - they are an international issue," Amnesty International said. "And when it comes to people fleeing those abuses, governments throughout the world, and not just in neighbouring countries, have an obligation to protect them."

According to international standards on refugees:

- individual governments are obligated not to force people to return to a country where they would be threatened with serious human rights violations. This fundamental principle applies in all circumstances.

- the international community is also responsible for helping those countries which receive a large number of asylum-seekers to ensure those people are getting the protection they need.

Amnesty International said the Iraqi government's history of torturing and killing thousands of Kurds and other political opponents, some in chemical weapons attacks, leaves no doubt about the danger these people would face if they were prevented from leaving or sent back.

"Death is the price that political opponents have often paid in the past," the organization said, "and could very well be the cost of the recent uprisings."

Recent eyewitness accounts of massacred civilians and torture centres found in northern and southern Iraq are concrete evidence of the brutality that Amnesty International has documented for years.

"In the months leading up to the invasion of Kuwait, hundreds of Kurdish people had "disappeared" or been killed," Amnesty International said, "despite the government's promises of safety under amnesties."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - THURSDAY 4 APRIL 1991

