

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Iraq: Urgent investigation needed into the killing of eight civilians

Amnesty International is calling on the US authorities to set up a prompt, impartial and independent investigation into the killing of eight civilians in a village north of Baghdad.

Eight family members, three women and five men, were killed by a US air strike in the early hours of Friday 19 September in the village of al-Dawr near Tikrit. An Iraqi medical doctor at Tikrit General Hospital reportedly said that the bodies of eight people were brought to the hospital and the victims appeared to have died of injuries consistent with those resulting from an air strike. Iraqi police and eye witnesses in the village confirmed that the eight dead were from the same family and that the deaths were the result of helicopter raids on the house they were living in.

The US military confirmed that US forces carried out the attack but stated that four of those killed were "terrorist suspects". A press release posted on the website of the Multinational Force (MNF) today gave the following account: "A suspected al-Qaeda in Iraq terrorist alleged to lead improvised device facilitation and brag about his victims was killed by Coalition forces during an operation in the Tikrit area." The statement added that "After arriving at the target, forces surrounded the building and called for its occupants to surrender. Despite nearly an hour of multiple calls and warnings that the force would engage them, the individuals inside refused to come out. An armed man appeared in the doorway, and Coalition forces, perceiving hostile intent based on the man's actions, engaged him. Later he was determined to be the suspected terrorist. During the operation, and in accordance with applicable rules, supporting aircraft engaged and killed three additional terrorist suspects. Three women were also killed. An Iraqi child was rescued from the rubbles by Coalition forces and was evacuated to a nearby base where he is receiving medical treatment."

This official account is inconsistent with information from eyewitnesses and others and raises serious concerns about how this operation was conducted. A prompt, thorough and independent investigation is urgently needed to examine whether relevant rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law were respected and to ensure that rules of engagement are not needlessly endangering the lives of civilians who are not directly participating in hostilities.

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