

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Iraq: Civilians killed by UK Armed Forces and armed groups**

UK Armed Forces in Iraq have shot and killed Iraqi civilians, including an eight-year-old girl and a guest at a wedding celebration, in situations where there was no apparent threat to themselves or others, says a new report from Amnesty International.

The report also details political and so-called 'moral' killings in the UK-administered south, by armed groups and individuals: former Ba'athists, professionals, alcohol sellers and shopkeepers selling music and videos have reportedly been killed, yet no prosecutions have been brought.

Many cases of civilian killings by UK Armed Forces have not even been investigated. Investigations by the Royal Military Police (RMP) have been secretive, with families given little or no information about their progress. Amnesty International is calling for a civilian-led investigation into all killings by UK Armed Forces, with the findings made public.

"Far from being liberated, the people of Iraq continue to live in fear and insecurity," Amnesty International said.

"Armed groups strike with seeming impunity. Killings by UK armed forces, in situations where they should not be using lethal force, are examined in secrecy and behind closed doors. Instead of the UK Armed Forces deciding whether to investigate themselves when people are killed, there must be a full, impartial and civilian-led investigation into all allegations of killings by UK troops."

The report, *Killings of Civilians in Basra and al-Amara*, is based on research carried out by Amnesty International delegates in February and March of this year. The organization interviewed families of the deceased and eyewitnesses to the killings, Iraqi police officers and Coalition Provisional Authority officials responsible for law and order.

It details numerous killings by UK armed forces and armed groups. One such case is that of eight-year-old Hanan Saleh Matrud, reportedly shot by a soldier from B Company of the First Battalion of the King's Regiment in August 2003. An eyewitness disputes the UK army's claim that she may have been hit accidentally by a warning shot. He told Amnesty International that Hanan was killed when a soldier aimed and fired a shot at her from around 60 metres away.

In January this year Ghanem Kadhem Kati' a 22-year-old unarmed man, was reportedly shot in the back outside his front door while celebrating a family wedding. UK soldiers -- responding to the sound of

bullets fired into the air in celebration -- fired five shots at him from 50 yards away, despite reportedly being told by a neighbour not to fire and that the earlier shots were in celebration. An RMP investigation is ongoing, but relatives have not been informed about the procedures for claiming compensation.

Families are frequently given no information on how to lodge a compensation claim for the killing of their relatives. In some cases they are given wrong information, including that responsibility for compensation would rest with a new Iraqi government. The Area Claims Officer, to whom claims must be submitted, is situated in an area difficult to access for ordinary civilians (Basra airport) and there is little explanatory information provided on the claims process in English or in Arabic. As a result, people interviewed had little confidence in the compensation system.

The report reveals killings of people, mainly Christians, involved in the alcohol trade. Licensed liquor sellers have been killed and their stores closed down. Sources report that around 150 Christian families have fled Basra. On 15 February 2004 a gang of 13 masked men opened fire with machine guns in the main street, in an area where alcohol was frequently sold, killing at least nine people.

"All armed groups and individuals in Iraq must respect the right to life and cease these killings immediately. The rule of law must prevail," Amnesty International said. "If there is to be true security in Iraq, it is essential that justice be done."

Amnesty International welcomes efforts by the UK and other governments to strengthen the capacity of the Iraqi police force. Yet this must be matched by a willingness of the police to act in all cases of law-breaking. Not a single prosecution has been brought for 'political' killings and some police officers told Amnesty International that they felt the killing of former Ba'athists was justified.

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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