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Iraq: Urgent inquiry needed into civilian killings by US troops

Amnesty International is calling for an inquiry into recent attacks in which civilians were killed in Iraq in circumstances which may have violated international law.

"There are worrying reports about the mounting casualties amongst civilians who find themselves caught in the battle between American troops and insurgents," said Abdel Salam Sidahmed, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Program in Amnesty International. "It is time to ask questions about whether these casualties could have been avoided, and whether needless deaths could be prevented in the future."

According to press and hospital reports, at least 44 people -- including many women and children -- were killed when US forces attacked targets allegedly connected to al-Qa'eda near the city of Falluja on Friday.

Thirteen civilians, including a young girl and a television cameraman working with al-Arabiya television, were killed in Haifa street in Baghdad on 12 September when US troops fired from a helicopter at a crowd, allegedly in response to shots fired from the same area. A US army spokesperson justified that attack and described the operation as "successful". The spokesperson said the US army did its best to "eliminate collateral damage". However, press reports contradict the US account that shots were fired at the helicopter from the same area.

"Multinational troops must take necessary precautions to protect civilians, and respect the principles of necessity and proportionality," said Abdel Salam Sidahmed. "Amnesty International is seeking clarification of the measures multinational forces are taking to ensure that they comply fully with their obligations under international law."

Amnesty International recognizes that the multinational troops are facing daily attacks, and as such are bound to protect the lives of their soldiers but equally they have a responsibility to protect Iraqi civilians.

A clarification on the legal responsibilities of multinational troops in Iraq is also needed. These troops have been provided broad powers to act "by preventing and deterring terrorism". However, the international or national standards which they must observe "to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq" remain unclear.

Iraq's Interim government is responsible for making sure that the multinational troops it has mandated to protect civilians and maintain security, law and order in the country, fulfil their mission while abiding by international humanitarian and human rights law. In addition, each of the states whose troops are deployed in Iraq is responsible for ensuring that its troops abide by international humanitarian and human

rights law.

"Amnesty International calls on all parties in Iraq to fully meet their obligations under international law, including by respecting all human rights which Iraq is bound to uphold under the human rights treaties to which it is a party.

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