

### **Iraq: Stop the torture**

*Amnesty International called on the Iraqi authorities to put an end to the systematic torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners and to introduce legislative and practical steps to improve the human rights situation in the country.*

*In a report published today -- Iraq: Systematic torture of political prisoners -- the organization paints a grim picture of routine torture, whereby horrendous physical and psychological suffering is inflicted upon political prisoners and detainees.*

*"Victims of torture in Iraq are subjected to a wide range of forms of torture, including the gouging out of eyes, severe beatings and electric shocks," said Amnesty International, based on interviews with hundreds of torture victims in Iraq over the years. "Some victims have died as a result and many have been left with permanent physical and psychological damage."*

*Other methods of torture include extinguishing of cigarettes on various parts of the body, extraction of finger nails and toenails and piercing of the hands with an electric drill. Some have been sexually abused and others have had objects, including broken bottles, forced into their anus. In addition to physical torture, detainees have been threatened with rape and subjected to mock executions.*

*Over the years many victims of torture have been Shia Muslims from Baghdad or from Southern Iraq. The fate of al-Shaikh Nazzar*

*Kadhim al-Bahadli, a 29-year-old theology student from Saddam City, a district of Baghdad, is typical. He was arrested in 1999 and was tortured for long periods in the building of Saddam City Security Directorate. His wife, father and mother were reportedly brought to the building in August 1999 and were tortured in front of him to force him to confess to being one of those responsible for the April 1999 disturbances in Saddam City. He was said to have confessed in order to spare his relatives any further torture. They were released following his confession but he was sentenced to death later and executed at the beginning of 2001.*

*Torture is used against other political opponents and army and security officers suspected of dissidence or involvement in coup attempts. Amnesty International's report also documents torture, ill-treatment and extra-judicial executions of women.*

A 25-year-old woman known as "Um Haydar" was beheaded in the street without charge or trial at the end of December 2000 after her husband, who was suspected by the authorities of involvement in Islamist armed activities, fled the country. Um Haydar was taken from her house in al-Karrada district, in front of her children and mother-in-law, by men belonging to *Fedaiyye Saddam*. Two men held her by the arms and a third pulled her head from behind and beheaded her in front of the residents. The beheading was also witnessed by members of the ruling Ba'ath Party in the area. The security men took the body and the head in a plastic bag and took away the children and mother-in-law. Their fate remains unknown.

The report stresses that torture in Iraq is also practised through various judicial punishments, which were introduced in the mid-1990s ostensibly to stem the increase in the crime rate that the Government attributed to the impact of economic sanctions imposed on the country since 1990. These 'judicial punishments,' including amputation of hand and foot, branding of forehead and cutting off of the ears, used to be publicized by the Iraqi media. Such publicity became rarer since the end of 1996, following international condemnation of these punishments.

Amnesty International's recommendations to the Iraqi authorities include renewed calls to ratify and implement fully in domestic law and practice the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; repeal all decrees imposing punishments amounting to torture; set up an independent body to undertake impartial investigations into all allegations of torture and bring to justice anyone responsible for serious violations; and put an end to all extra-judicial executions.

"The systematic torture and climate of fear that have prevailed in Iraq for so many years must be brought to an end," Amnesty

*International said. "The continuing scale and severity of human suffering must not be allowed to continue."*

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