

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
PRESS RELEASE**

AI Index: PRE01/278/2012
08 June 2012

Iraq: Execution of former Saddam aide raises fears for others

The Iraqi authorities must halt the country's alarming rate of executions, Amnesty International said after a former aide to Saddam Hussain became the latest death penalty convict to be executed this year.

Abed Hamid Mahmoud, also known as Abed Hamoud, was executed by hanging on Thursday, taking the total number of executions in Iraq in the first half of 2012 to at least 70.

Abed Hamoud was presidential secretary and bodyguard to the former Iraqi President Saddam Hussain.

Two other members of Saddam's former cabinet are among those facing imminent execution.

"The killing of Abed Hamoud is part of an alarming escalation in executions in Iraq and we fear others may soon face the same fate," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director at Amnesty International.

"The Iraqi authorities should refrain from using the death penalty, commute the sentences of all those on death row, believed to number several hundred, and declare a moratorium on executions."

Abed Hamoud was number four on the US list of most-wanted Iraqi officials following the US-led 2003 invasion of Iraq.

He was arrested in June 2003 by American forces and sentenced to death in October 2010 by the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal (SICT), together with former government ministers Tariq Aziz and Sadoun Shakir.

All three were convicted of participating in the crackdown of opposition political activists under Saddam Hussain, which they denied. Tariq Aziz and Sadoun Shakir are at risk of imminent execution.

"Saddam Hussain's rule was synonymous with unlawful killings, torture and other gross human rights violations, and those who committed such crimes should be brought to justice," said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

"But the death penalty, which is the ultimate denial of human rights, should never be used, whatever the gravity of the crime.

"Instead, the present Iraqi government should demonstrate a clear break with the past by following the global trend away from the death penalty."

Amnesty International has repeatedly expressed concern about trials conducted before the SICT, which has a mandate to prosecute those accused of crimes committed under Saddam Hussain.

Its independence as a court of law has been undermined by repeated political interference.

The death penalty was suspended in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 but restored in August 2004. Since then, hundreds of people have been sentenced to death and many have been executed. According to Amnesty International information, in 2011 at least 68 people were executed in Iraq in total.