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Iraq: targeting of diplomats by armed groups a worrying new trend, says Amnesty International

Amnesty International today condemned abduction of Egypt's ambassador to Iraq on Saturday and this morning's attempted assassination of Bahrain's envoy and the attack on Pakistan ambassador's convoy, as an intensely worrying new trend in abuses by armed groups.

The attacks on Arab and foreign diplomats in recent days appear to represent a new and worrying phase in the campaign by armed groups opposed to the Iraqi government and the presence of US and other foreign troops in Iraq. Clearly, the aim of these groups is to deter Arab foreign governments from developing close relations with the new Iraqi administration and are seeking to ratchet up further their campaign of violence against all those associated with the new government.

Egyptian ambassador Ihab al-Sherif was seized from a Baghdad street on 2 July and has not been seen since; there are grave fears for his safety following previous abductions, torture and killings of Iraqi and other foreign hostages at the hands of militant armed groups such as Ansar al-Sunna and al-Qa'ida of Jihad Organization in the Land of Two Rivers. Today, Hassan Malallah al-Ansari, Bahrain's senior diplomat in Iraq, narrowly escaped assassination when four gunmen attacked him in Baghdad's Mansour district. He was injured in the hand but otherwise escaped serious injury, while gunmen in two cars reportedly fired at the convoy of Pakistan's ambassador, Younis Khan, also in Mansour district of Baghdad. He escaped injury.

These attacks follow similar targeted assassinations of Iraqi nationals associated with the new government headed by Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Ja'afari and the previous administration led by Iyad Allawi. Those killed or injured in such attacks have included judges and senior civil servants as well as government ministers and police and army officials. By far the greatest number of those killed have been Iraqi civilians, thousands of whom have been killed or injured in attacks and suicide and other bombings by armed groups.

Amnesty International has repeatedly condemned attacks against civilians as well as kidnapping, hostage-taking and other grave abuses committed by armed groups and called for an immediate cessation of such abuses; the organization is calling on those responsible to release Egyptian ambassador Ihab al-Sherif and all other hostages immediately and unconditionally.

