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Amnesty International says governments must protect civilian life

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at the potential indiscriminate killings of civilians in Iraq, in the context of the present military operations by the US and UK forces.

According to reports, around 30 people were killed and 100 others wounded, some seriously, during the attack on Baghdad which started on Wednesday at 2200 GMT. Last night 10 missiles are reported to have fallen on residential areas of the city, destroying a number of houses. Iran said that a US missile struck the city of Khoramshahr, near the border with Iraq, early on Thursday. No casualties were reported.

In June 1997, a US General Accounting Office report entitled "Operation Desert Storm - evaluation of the air campaign" stated that "many of the Department of Defence's and Manufacturers' postwar claims about weapon system performance - particularly the F117, Tomahawk land attack missile and laser guided bombs - were overstated, misleading, inconsistent with the best available data, or unverifiable."

"The experience of previous armed interventions in the Gulf has shown that, all too often, civilians become the acceptable casualties of war", Amnesty International said, adding that on 16 December the organization warned that "imminent military attacks by US and UK forces could lead to indiscriminate or disproportionate killings of civilians".

Noting reports that a wheat storage house in Tekrit, north of Baghdad, is said to have been burnt by missiles, the human rights organization has reminded the US and UK governments of the general prohibition in international humanitarian law to attack objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Amnesty International is also concerned about the closure by Jordan, Syria and Turkey of their border with Iraq which would prevent people fleeing the attacks from seeking safety in these countries. Amnesty International calls on all neighbouring countries to guarantee the right to protection in another country for refugees fleeing when their life, safety and security are at risk.

The human rights organization reiterates that the international community has an obligation to provide all necessary assistance to ensure that the responsibility of dealing with refugees is shared by all states and does not fall disproportionately on those geographically close to Iraq.

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