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Iraq must halt executions

Amnesty International reiterates its urgent call to halt all execution in Iraq following reports that 26 people were executed this week and fears that others might be executed in the coming days.

A spokesman of the Iraqi Ministry of Justice reportedly announced that on Wednesday 29 August five people had been executed. Two days earlier, according to the Ministry, already 21 people had been executed, including three women.

Amnesty International has spoken to Iraqi human rights activists who have confirmed that three women aged between 23 and 49 years, one of them convicted for terrorism related offences and the others for murder were among those executed this week

These latest executions bring the total number of people executed this year to at least 96. This is a significant and worrying increase compared to the previous year. According to Amnesty International's information, in 2011 a total of at least 68 people were executed in Iraq. Amnesty International's concerns are compounded by the flaws in the Iraqi criminal justice system.

Since the death penalty was reintroduced in Iraq in 2004, hundreds of people have been sentenced to death and are now on death row. Amnesty International has denounced throughout the years that many trials of those sentenced to death failed to meet international standards for fair trials, including that "confessions" obtained under torture or other ill-treatment had been used as evidence against them. Some Iraqi television stations continue to broadcast self-incriminating testimonies of detainees even before the opening of a trial, undermining the fundamental right of defendants to be considered innocent until proven guilty.

Amnesty International is urging the Iraqi authorities to refrain from using the death penalty, commute all death sentences to terms of imprisonment and declare a moratorium on executions. This year, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions have both called for the establishment of a moratorium on the death penalty in Iraq.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty – the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment – in all cases without exception, as a violation of the right to life.