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Iraq: Human rights must be foundation for rebuilding

Amman - On the eve of a major conference being organised by the World Economic Forum, where the future and reconstruction of Iraq will be discussed, Amnesty International today expressed concern over the current human rights situation in Iraq, saying: "respect for human rights must be the foundation to achieve security, peace and freedom in Iraq."

Delegates returning from Iraq reported that the occupying powers, the United States and the United Kingdom, are not living up to their responsibilities in ensuring the security and welfare of the Iraqi population. The organization is also concerned that more than two thousand Iraqis remain in detention in the custody of the occupying powers in the airport and other holding centres with no access to family or lawyers, and with no access to judicial review.

"The notorious Abu Ghraib Prison, centre of torture and mass executions under Saddam Hussein, is yet again a prison cut off from the outside world. On 13 June there was a protest in this prison against indefinite detention without trial. Troops from the occupying powers killed one person and wounded seven." Dr Abdel Salam Sidahmed, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East Program, reported following his visit to Iraq.

In a newly released report, *On whose behalf? Human rights and the economic reconstruction process in Iraq*, Amnesty International argues that: "the goal of reconstruction should be to ensure the effective protection and realization of all human rights for all Iraqis. Reconstruction will only succeed if human rights are at the centre of the process." The report raises numerous concerns addressed to the occupying powers and to private companies who are rushing to enter or invest in Iraq.

UN Security Council resolution 1483 of 22 May 2003 lifted the long-standing sanctions regime and provided an international framework for the reconstruction process. However, the "Development Fund" mentioned in the resolution, and where monies raised from oil sales will be deposited, is under the clear control of the occupying powers, and even the "independent" body mandated to oversee expenditures from the Fund, is not directly accountable at an international level.

"Without some international accountability, there is no assurance that either body will direct reconstruction efforts towards the protection of human rights," said Amnesty International, "or, at a minimum, ensure that development projects do not end up causing human rights abuses."

There was a good deal of talk from the coalition forces about the human rights of the Iraqi people

before the war. "If this was genuine, the US and UK should now make clear that projects directed at human rights protection will receive priority attention in the reconstruction process" said Amnesty. They should also commit to including information on how disbursements made under the Fund further human rights protection in their reports to the Security Council.

The conference is being billed as looking to the future: "It is worrying, therefore, that human rights issues are not even mentioned on the detailed, 8 page agenda," said David Petrusek, Senior Director of Amnesty International's Policy and Evaluation Program. "We are attending the meeting to insist that there can be no rebuilding without a foundation comprising the rule of law, equality and respect for *all* human rights of *all* Iraqis. The successful reconstruction of Iraq demands too that there is effective justice for the hundreds of thousands of victims of past human rights abuses in Iraq."

"Reconstruction is not just a narrow economic matter," added Amnesty International. Particularly in a situation of occupation, the rebuilding process will necessarily impact greatly on political and social issues, and on human rights across the board. "There must be justice for past abuses, but what is needed also is an assurance of social justice in the future."

The report raises concerns about a lack of transparency in the awarding of contracts and the reconstruction process, arguing that the lack of information denies Iraqis their right to participate in making decisions on important issues including the rebuilding of the justice system, and projects in relation to policing, health, and education.

The current situation in Iraq shows the occupying powers failing to meet the security and personal safety needs of the Iraqi people. Hundreds of thousands of families are struggling to meet the requirements of daily life without salaries or pensions. In this situation, people are increasingly frustrated and do not know who to turn to with their concerns or complaints.

"It is almost impossible to find out the names of the frequently changing officials who are running government departments and there appears to be no system of regular communication between the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Iraqi population," said Amnesty International.

"The occupying powers must make an explicit commitment to involve Iraqis in decision-making related to the reconstruction. Iraqis themselves, ideally through representative institutions, ought to make decisions on rebuilding, on foreign investment, and on the selling of state assets," the organization said. Women too must be fully involved in the reconstruction process, as a necessary condition for the successful and peaceful rebuilding of Iraq.

The report directs several concerns at private companies, noting in particular the fear that company practices should not undermine support for the rule of law through encouraging corruption. Amnesty International is asking companies to measure their conduct against a new set of UN human rights principles drafted especially for business, and to avoid the arbitrary displacement of people that large infrastructure projects can often lead to. The report also urges companies to observe internationally-recognized security norms, in particular in employment and instructions to security personnel, and to avoid any kind of discrimination in their employment of Iraqis.

"A failure to fully integrate reforms to protect human rights in the process of change would be a betrayal of the people of Iraq." Amnesty International concluded.

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