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# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 93/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - SAUDI ARABIA

PLEASE NOTE: The enclosed item on Saudi Arabia is the news release embargoed for 10 May.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

## INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Saudi Arabia - 10 May - SEE NEWS SERVICE 62

Burundi - 17 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 81/94, 53/94 and 36/94

China - 1 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

Pakistan - 29 June - SEE NEWS SERVICE 81/94

## TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

China - 5 May - SEE NEWS SERVICES 81/94 AND 86/94

## FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES

Annual Report - 7 July - SEE NEWS SERVICE 51/94

News Service 93/94

AI INDEX: MDE 23/WU 01/94

EMBARGOED FOR 0001 HRS GMT TUESDAY 10 MAY 1994

**SAUDI ARABIA: "WELCOME GUESTS" FROM IRAQ ABUSED AND KILLED**

Hundreds of Iraqi refugees who sought shelter in Saudi Arabia after the 1991 Gulf war have been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and ill-treated, deliberately killed or forcibly returned to Iraq during the past three years, according to Amnesty International.

In a report published today, the worldwide human rights organization said that the refugees held at Rafha camp and, until its closure in December 1992, Artawiyya camp, "have been subjected to treatment unacceptable by any international standards for the treatment of refugees". In most cases, the refugees are abused for a wide range of perceived offenses, including criticising the camps' authorities, protesting living conditions, being "disobedient" or in order to extract "confessions".

Some 23,000 Iraqi refugees remained in Saudi Arabia as of April 1994. They include former members of the Iraqi armed forces who surrendered to the allied forces at the end of the Gulf war and who refused to be repatriated, and civilians who fled southern Iraq in the aftermath of the crushing of the March 1991 mass uprising. Following widespread condemnation by a number of international non-governmental organizations, the Saudi Arabian authorities made improvements in the refugees' living conditions and said large amounts of money were invested in new facilities.

While Amnesty International welcomed the Saudi Arabian authorities' decision to grant temporary shelter to Iraqi civilians and former Iraqi army personnel, whom they have dubbed "welcome guests", the organization has documented numerous cases of gross human rights violations.

Amnesty International has evidence of a pattern of torture and ill-treatment, including the systematic use of various forms of collective punishments -- such as denying the refugees food and water -- particularly in response to protests about living conditions and treatment at the hands of the camp authorities.

None of the reports of torture or deaths in custody have been investigated by an independent judicial authority according to Amnesty International. Indeed, available evidence indicates that the Saudi Arabian government has turned a blind eye to torture and ill-treatment and has allowed it to take place with impunity.

Amnesty International has also received numerous reports of possible extrajudicial executions of refugees resulting from the excessive use of lethal force by the Saudi Arabian military authorities. Protests and marches inside the camps have been met with tanks and soldiers firing indiscriminately into crowds of refugees, Amnesty International said. In one incident in March 1993, at least nine refugees in Rafha camp may have been extrajudicially executed by soldiers in violence sparked by a protest against the Saudi Arabian authorities' refusal to grant asylum to an Iraqi family fleeing southern Iraq. One of the nine victims, Jabbar Muhammad al-Etaym, was reportedly shot at point blank range by a guard and died instantly.

Following an incident in which four Saudi Arabian nationals also died after being trapped in the camp's educational centre which was set on fire by the refugees, over 400 refugees were arrested by the authorities. 31 of them are believed to be still held without trial in 'Ar'ar prison. They have been denied their most basic legal rights, including access to lawyers and to members of their families.

The Saudi Arabian authorities have also forcibly returned hundreds of refugees to Iraq, where they risk arbitrary arrest, torture or execution. In most cases, forcible return was used to punish individuals accused of criminal offenses as well as those deemed by the camp authorities to be "trouble-makers". This practice has also been used to suppress all forms of criticism and

**protest by the refugees, who live in constant fear of being forcibly returned to Iraq. In other cases, forcible return allegedly resulted from connivance between some camp authorities and Iraqi intelligence agents.**

**To date, the Saudi Arabian government has not responded to or refused repeated requests by Amnesty International to send a delegation to the Kingdom to discuss its concerns with the relevant authorities. Amnesty International today urged the government to implement a series of recommendations contained in its report aimed at safeguarding the refugees' basic human rights.**

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