
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 155/93

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - IRAQ

PLEASE NOTE: EFAI has a new address from 22 November. Following are their new details: 17, rue du Pont-aux-Choux, 75003 PARIS. Tel: +331 44 59 29 89, Fax: + 331 44 59 29 80, Mac 44 59 29 86, PC 44 59 29 87. Katie Rickards, in the Secretary General's Office at the IS has the full list of individuals' direct numbers, so please contact her if you need it.

PLEASE NOTE: Enclosed external item on Iraq will be sent to international media by AI UN New York office.

NEWS INITIATIVES - INTERNAL

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 7 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137
Iraq - 23/24 November - ENCLOSED
India - 15 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 137

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

South Africa - 1 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 151
Human Rights Day Speech - 9 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 138

FORTHCOMING NEWS INITIATIVES 1994

Tunisia - 12 January
South Africa - 19 January
Colombia - 16 March - SEE NEWS SERVICE 123 + UAs AMR 23/56+57/93

News Service 155/93

AI INDEX: MDE 14/WU 03/93
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IRAQ: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CALLS ON UNITED NATIONS TO SET UP HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING URGENTLY

Amnesty International is today urging the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to act urgently and decisively in response to the alarming deterioration in the human rights situation in Iraq in recent months.

The human rights organization is calling on the General Assembly to request the UN Secretary-General to make available without further delay the necessary human and financial resources for establishing a human rights monitoring operation for Iraq, a proposal which the UN's own Special Rapporteur on Iraq first made nearly two years ago.

The General Assembly itself endorsed this proposal at its 1992 session and in March this year the Commission on Human Rights requested the UN Secretary-General, in consultation with the Special Rapporteur, to take the necessary measures in order to send human rights monitors to appropriate locations and to provide the additional resources required. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that no concrete steps have been taken by the UN to implement this resolution at a time when the Iraqi Government continues to commit atrocities as a matter of policy and remains in breach of Security Council Resolution 688 of 5 April 1991 which called on Iraq to "immediately cease [the] repression" of its civilian population.

Iraqi refugees fleeing to southern Iran in recent weeks have reported the use of chemical weapons against civilians in the southern marshes region by Iraqi government forces in the last week of September. Amnesty International welcomes the UN's decision to investigate these reports by sending a team of UNSCOM experts to Iran nine days ago, and to Iraq's marshes region in the last few days. However, these initiatives are limited in scope since they are aimed solely at determining whether chemical weapons were used by Iraq in this instance and not the broader issue of the deliberate targeting and killing of civilians. They are no substitute for a longer-term, fully trained and adequately resourced monitoring operation warranted by Iraq's appalling human rights situation. Although the recent allegations of the use of chemical weapons are still awaiting confirmation, the deliberate killing of hundreds of unarmed civilians in many such incidents over the past two years is not in question.

Ground military attacks on civilian targets in the marshes have continued unabated and have only intensified since the imposition of an "air exclusion zone" over southern Iraq in August 1992. The government's drainage of large stretches of marshland, its destruction of the local inhabitants' means of livelihood and its policy of deliberately targeting non-combatant civilians have already triggered an exodus of some 6000 to 7,000 people to southern Iran since June, with many more expected to join them before the end of this year. In recent months these attacks have been concentrated in the al-Hammar marshes which have yet to be drained. On 26 September, scores of unarmed civilians reportedly died and others were injured following military attacks using artillery and mortar shells in the Abu Zargi and al-Ulaiwi marshes northwest of Basra, including the villages of Abu al-Sanadij, al-Ghatra and al-Ghag. It is in these attacks that Iraqi forces were said to have used chemical weapons.

In southern Iraq as a whole, hundreds of suspected government opponents, including whole families, have been rounded up in recent months by military, security and intelligence personnel as part of the government's continuing crackdown on the Shi'a Muslim population. This campaign of repression appears to have intensified on all fronts since August, alongside the religious persecution of the community. According to the testimony of numerous eyewitnesses and former detainees, many of these arrests are carried out on a random and arbitrary basis. Military forces surround a given area or village, enabling security and intelligence forces to enter and arrest at will, generally targeting males over the age of 15 or 16. Those being sought are principally individuals suspected of assisting anti-government "saboteurs", of having participated in the March 1991 uprising or whose loyalty to the central authorities is otherwise in question. Places of detention such as the notorious al-Radwaniyya Garrison, as well as the al-Ramadi garrisons, Abu Ghraib Prison and others are their destination.

Many died under torture or were executed en masse. Numerous and consistent testimonies from former detainees received in 1993 confirm what is already known to many: that torture in Iraq's prisons remains systematic and brutal. Hundreds of those who survived such treatment were later executed. Former detainees held at al-Radwaniyya Garrison testified that executions were carried out regularly throughout this year, with scores executed in September and October alone. Some of the victims were executed by firing squad at night and then buried in mass graves inside the garrison; others were allegedly burned to death. The mutilated bodies of others held there and in Abu Ghraib Prison were returned to their families, who were forbidden from holding public mourning. Others have been held for short periods, tortured and then released after forcing their families to make large cash payments.

Elsewhere in Iraq, scores of prominent Sunni Arabs were rounded up in August this year, some of them from President Saddam Hussain's stronghold in Tikrit. They included retired army officers, economists, lawyers and former government officials. Several were executed some ten days ago while two others died 48 hours after their release from prison.

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