

AI Index: PRE01/312/2012
27 June 2012

Syria: Attack on TV station condemned as UN report finds violence worsening

Media workers killed during an attack on a pro-government TV station in Syria should not have been targeted, Amnesty International said today.

The organization said that Ikhbariya TV, like other media facilities, is a civilian object, and those working in the media are civilians and must be protected from attack.

“Even a media organization engaged in propaganda is still a civilian object, so it and those working for it must never be deliberately targeted,” said Ann Harrison, Amnesty International’s Middle East and North Africa Deputy Director.

“All parties should condemn this attack and make clear to those under their command that attacks of this nature and other such violations will not be tolerated.”

According to the state news agency SANA, three journalists and four security workers were killed in the attack which took place early on Wednesday morning when armed men stormed the station’s headquarters in the town of Drousha, about 15 miles south of Damascus.

Several representatives of the opposition have claimed publicly that members of armed opposition groups or defectors carried out the attack.

The privately-owned pro-governmental Ikhbariya TV station has broadcast programmes throughout the 15-month crisis which have blamed the violence on “terrorists” and shown what appear to be forced “confessions” of alleged dissidents.

It has also carried apparently coerced statements denouncing as “traitors” individuals who have criticised the Syrian government made by their neighbours and others.

Under international humanitarian law, in an armed conflict, only combatants and military objectives may lawfully be attacked. Military objectives are limited to those objects which make an effective contribution to military action and whose destruction offers a definite military advantage.

New UN report on Syria

The attack came as the Independent Commission of Inquiry’s latest update on Syria said that Syrian government forces have committed human rights violations across the country "on an alarming scale" over the last three months.

The Commission says it continues to investigate May’s massacre at Houla which led to the death of more than 100 people. Based on its investigations so far, it says that “forces loyal to the Government may have

been responsible for many of the deaths”. The Commission has been unable to visit the area until now as it has not been given access to the area by the government.

The update also documents a range of abuses by anti-government armed groups which have been reported to the Commission, including the torture and killing of captured soldiers and shabiha as well as the kidnapping and killing of people known or suspected to support or work with the government and its forces and militias.

Amnesty International, which is investigating human rights abuses by members of the opposition, has condemned without reservation such abuses and in its latest report earlier this month called on the leadership of all armed opposition groups in Syria to publicly state that such acts are prohibited and to do all within their power to ensure that opposition forces put an immediate end to such abuses.

The report also warns that the situation risks becoming more aggravated in the coming months as fighting intensifies.

“There is now an urgent need for the international community to review the Annan plan, including the terms of the UN observer mission and consider how it could be better established and equipped to deliver human rights protection on the ground,” said Ann Harrison