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Iraq: Investigate ‘horrific’ wave of attacks

The Iraqi authorities must urgently launch a thorough, impartial investigation into a wave of bomb attacks and shootings across Iraq on Sunday which reportedly killed at least 81 people, many of them civilians, and left scores more injured, Amnesty International said.

The apparently coordinated attacks in multiple cities appear to have targeted Iraqi civilians. Members of the security and armed forces also seemed to have been targeted. Car bomb explosions in several, predominantly Shi’a areas were among the deadliest attacks.

“This horrific wave of attacks shows an utter disregard for humanity – the Iraqi authorities must ensure an immediate, thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation is carried out and those responsible are brought to justice in proceedings that comply with the most rigorous internationally recognized standards for fair trial,” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director for the Middle East and North Africa at Amnesty International.

“There is no justification for the deliberate targeting of civilians – it is abhorrent and shows a total disregard for international human rights standards as well as the basic principles of humanity.”

Several bombings across southern Iraq – including in the cities of Basra and Nasiriyah and a market near the Imam Ali al-Sharqi shrine – also resulted in deaths and injuries.

Meanwhile, a car bomb near the northern city of Kirkuk appeared to have targeted people lining up to seek employment at an oil facility, and two explosions in Kirkuk itself killed three people and wounded scores more.

Nobody has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks

Trial *in absentia*

The attacks came as an Iraqi court sentenced the Iraqi Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi to death after he was convicted, together with his son-in-law, Ahmed Qahtan for allegedly ordering killing a lawyer and a Shi’a security official.

Al-Hashemi, is now in Turkey and has been in office since 2005. He has denied the charges, which he claims are politically motivated.

“The death penalty is the ultimate cruel, degrading and inhuman punishment and a violation of the right to life. This latest sentence is part of an alarming and sweeping use of the death penalty in Iraq. We call on the authorities to commute al-Hashemi’s sentence immediately” said Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui.

Background

In December, state run TV channel Al-Iraqiya broadcast "confessions" by men said to be al-Hashemi’s

bodyguards saying that they had killed police officers and officials from ministries in exchange for payoffs from al-Hashemi. This is in violation of fair trial standards, especially the presumption of innocence.

One of the bodyguards, Amer al-Battawi, died in custody in March 2012 after being held for three months. His family reportedly claimed his body bore signs of having been tortured.

The Iraqi authorities denied the torture allegations and said al-Battawi died of kidney failure.

One of al-Hashemi's female employees is currently in detention.

Rasha Nameer Jaafer al-Hussain, who was working at the Iraqi Vice-President's Office, was arrested without a warrant at her parents' house in Baghdad district on 1 January 2012. The security forces claimed they were taking her away for questioning and that she would return two hours later. Her family did not hear of her whereabouts for weeks.

A second woman, Bassima Saleem Kiryakos, was released, apparently without charge, on around 10 April. She was arrested after her house in Baghdad was raided by over 15 armed security men in military uniform. The men did not have an arrest warrant.

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