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Turkey/Iraq: Investigation needed into killing of civilians in the Kurdistan region of Iraq

The killing several days ago of an Iraqi Kurdish family of seven, including two women and four children, when the vehicle they were travelling in was attacked in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, reportedly by a Turkish warplane, must be promptly and independently investigated, Amnesty International said today.

In the early afternoon of 21 August 2011 Hussain Mostafa Hassan, a 61-year-old Kurdish farmer from the village of Bolle near Mount Qandil on the Iraq-Iran border, was heading to the town of Rania, accompanied by six members of his family, when the car he was driving was bombed, reportedly by a warplane belonging to the Turkish armed forces. Hussain Mostafa Hassan, his 43-year-old wife, Mer Haci Mam Kak, his daughter Rezan Hussain Mostafa, aged 20, together with her two daughters Sonia Shamal Hassan, aged two, and Sholin Shamel Hassan, aged six months, his son Zana Hussain Mostafa, aged 11, and his niece Oskar Khuzer Hassan, aged 10, all died as a result. Later their burnt bodies were taken to a hospital in Rania and buried the same day.

Since 17 August 2011 Turkish warplanes had been attacking Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) targets in the mountainous regions of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, particularly in the vicinity of Mount Qandil on the Iraq-Iran border. The raids, said to be in retaliation for the killing of 12 Turkish soldiers by the PKK in Turkey, have forced many people to desert their villages.

Iranian troops have also been shelling border areas inside the Kurdistan region of Iraq in recent weeks, apparently targeting strongholds controlled by an Iranian Kurdish armed group, the Party for a Free Life for Kurdistan (PJAK). At least three civilians have reportedly been killed, including a 13-year-old shepherd on 28 July 2011.

Iraqi Kurdish politicians, including Mas'ud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, as well as journalists and human rights activists, have all condemned the Turkish air raids. Several demonstrations have also been organized in Sulaimaniya, Erbil and other cities and towns in the Kurdistan region and elsewhere in Iraq to protest against the raid.

Amnesty International calls on the Turkish authorities to open a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into this incident. The investigation should determine whether Turkish forces respected relevant rules of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and its findings should be made public. Anyone reasonably suspected of having committed a serious violation should be brought to justice in proceedings that conform to international fair trial standards, and surviving family members of those killed must receive reparations, including adequate compensation.

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