

Headline: Stop "honour killings" in Iraq

Subhead: The stoning to death of a 17-year-old girl in Northern Iraq shows how urgently reform of the Iraqi law is needed.

Take action: Call on the Iraqi government to make "honour killing" a serious criminal offence.

Image:

Caption: Du'a Khalil Aswad was stoned to death in Northern Iraq on 7 April 2007 © Awene

Feature:

"Some of you are aware of a video that is on the internet which shows Du'a Aswad, a young Yezidi girl, being stoned to death for falling in love with a Sunni man. It is a revolting video, but unfortunately many women live with the daily fear of violence." -- Secretary General Irene Khan speaking at the launch of Amnesty International Report 2007.

A 17-year-old girl was publicly stoned to death for an "honour crime" in the town of Bashika, near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, on 7 April 2007. **Du'a Khalil Aswad**, from the village of Bahzan was a member of the minority non-Muslim Yezidi community in Iraq and had been involved in a relationship with a Muslim boy. She had been missing from her home for one night.

She had also apparently converted to Islam, although some reports denied this was the case. While she was being given shelter in the house of a Yezidi tribal leader in Bashika, a crowd of men stormed the house and **dragged her outside**. Up to eight or nine men, including some of her relatives, **stoned her to death** in the presence of hundreds of people, some of whom were recording the incident on their mobile phones.

Local security forces were reported to have witnessed the killing, **but failed to intervene** to prevent the stoning or arrest those responsible.

Iraq is currently going through an unprecedented level of violence and, since the 2003 US-led invasion, women have been victims of **kidnapping and rape** by criminal gangs and abuses by armed groups opposed to the Iraqi government and the presence of foreign troops.

There have been reports of a sharp rise in "honour crimes" of women by male relatives across the country, particularly in the Kurdistan region. Iraqi law allows for **lenient sentences** for men perpetrators of these crimes.

In 2000 and 2002, the Kurdish authorities introduced amendments to the law, but incidents of "honour crimes" continue to be reported. In its statement of 1 May, the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) said there had been **40 convictions** for "honour killings" in the Kurdistan region and that at least 24 other cases are pending.

Despite appeals and pressure from local and international human rights activists, the Iraqi government has failed to introduce legal reforms to make "honour killing" **a serious criminal offence** or take appropriate action to protect those at risk of becoming victims of "honour crimes".

Amnesty International issued a public statement on 27 April condemning the stoning of Du'a Khalil Aswad and calling on **the Iraqi authorities** to bring to justice those responsible. The KRG, which controls three northern provinces, issued a statement on 1 May pointing out that the stoning took place in the area administered by the Iraqi government. It also called for her killers to be brought to justice.

So far, there has been no public reaction from the Iraqi government. AI wrote to the Iraqi authorities on 8 May seeking information about any investigation into the killing and calling for her killers to be **held accountable**. AI also called for Iraqi law to be amended to ensure that "honour killings" are made a serious criminal offence.

According to latest information, four men have been arrested and **charged with the murder**. Among them is Du'a Khalil Aswad's cousin. They are being detained at Faisaliah Prison in Mosul. At least two other men, including Du'a Khalil Aswad's uncle, are reported to be currently sought by the authorities.

In an apparent **act of retaliation**, 23 Yezidi workers were killed on 22 April reportedly by gunmen from a Sunni Muslim armed group, between Bashika and Mosul. Amnesty International has also called for the perpetrators of this crime to be brought to justice.

Take action!

[Letter]

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to express my shock and horror at the stoning to death of 17-year-old girl Du'a Khalil Aswad in the town of Bashika on 7 April 2007. This was a revolting incident that shows how women live with the daily fear of violence.

Despite this incident and pressure from human rights activists, "honour killing" is not yet a serious criminal offence in Iraq. I urge you and your government to take all necessary action to introduce legal reforms to make so-called "honour killing" a serious criminal offence and to protect those at risk of becoming victims of "honour crimes".

Yours sincerely

Please send appeals via the Iraqi embassy or diplomatic representative in your country, asking them to kindly forward your appeals to:

Prime Minister
Nuri Kamil al-Maliki
Baghdad
Republic of Iraq
Salutation: Your Excellency