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Jordan: Investigate use of force against Iranian Kurdish Refugees

Amnesty International is calling on the Jordanian government to investigate allegations that Jordanian security forces used excessive force against members of a group of Iranian Kurdish refugees who, on 14 June 2006, held a peaceful protest against their living conditions and calling for their re-settlement in a safe third country. According to reports, they were attacked by Jordanian security forces in the so-called No Man's Land (NML) desert area between the borders of Iraq and Jordan, where they have been living in harsh conditions, since January 2005. Several of the refugees, including a pregnant woman, are reported to have been injured when they were beaten with sticks by Jordanian security officials. One of the refugees is also reported to have been taken into Jordanian custody and badly beaten before being released.

Amnesty International urges the Jordanian authorities to establish a prompt and independent investigation into these allegations and, if they prove to be well-founded, to ensure that any Jordanian officials responsible for ordering or using excessive force are held to account. As well, the government should ensure that all Jordanian law enforcement bodies are instructed clearly that they must act in conformity with Jordan's international human rights obligations and standards on the use of force, including the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms. In recent years Amnesty International has received some reports of Jordanian security forces beating and arresting peaceful demonstrators who are perceived as critics of government policies including members of the Professional Associations and Palestinian refugees.

Background

This group of 183 Iranian Kurdish refugees had been resident in Iraq for almost 30 years. They lived at the al-Tash camp, located near Ramadi in central Iraq, until they left, along with other refugees resident there, due to growing concerns about their safety in Iraq. In January 2005, they arrived at the border with Jordan but were denied entry by Jordanian officials, although some 743 other refugees were admitted to Jordan during 2005. Since then the 183 refugees have remained on the Iraqi side of the NML, living in tents and surviving mostly on assistance and goods brought or donated by travellers passing along the highway connecting Iraq and Jordan. The refugees do not wish to be relocated to Iraq's Kurdish autonomous area, reportedly because they fear that they would be at risk from Iranian security agents who they believe to be active in the area.

As the refugees are residing on the Iraqi side of the NML, Iraq has primary responsibility to ensure that the refugees are safe and have access to adequate food, water, shelter, and medical assistance. However, Jordan also has a responsibility to protect them when they enter areas of the NML under Jordanian jurisdiction.

Iraq, Jordan and other countries in the region should make all possible efforts as soon as possible, through

cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to find a timely, viable and durable solution for these refugees, ensuring that they are able to settle as soon as possible in a country in safety and dignity.

In March, over one hundred Palestinian refugees were stranded for several weeks near the Iraqi/Jordanian border after fleeing the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, where many of the group had lived for decades, following an increase in killings and "disappearances" of Palestinians living there. Jordan denied the group entry to Jordanian territory, in violation of its obligations under international law. Under the internationally-recognized principle of non-refoulement, Jordan has an obligation not to reject individuals at its borders if they are fleeing a country where they risk persecution or where their life or freedom is at risk. The group was later re-settled in Syria.

Over the years Jordan has hosted huge numbers of refugees. Approximately two-thirds of its population are of Palestinian-origin who fled their homes since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. In recent years hundreds of thousands of Iraqis left their country to live in Jordan.

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